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**THE BISHOP'S BOOTS
AND OTHER ESSAYS**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE BISHOP'S BOOTS

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

WALTER A. MURSELL

AUTHOR OF
"BYWAYS IN BOOKLAND"



LONDON: GAY & HANCOCK, LTD.

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TO
R. C. LEMIN
WITH THE OLD AFFECTION

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THE BISHOP'S BOOTS

AND OTHER ESSAYS

ON GOING BACK

THERE is a melancholy pleasure in revisiting places where one has been happy. The suggestion was forcibly brought home to me by my brother expressing a desire to see the old garden where we used to play as boys. I dearly wish we could see it again together. Some day, if I can summon up sufficient courage to ring the bell of the house where I was born, and to proffer a timid request to a perfect stranger, I *will* see it. Maybe the present occupant of that "desirable residence" will refuse the request. Maybe he will not believe my tale or the sincerity of my desire, and regard me as a sentimental lunatic; or, perhaps —horrific thought—he will look upon me as a person of sinister designs with an eye to the umbrellas or the spoons. Never mind; I shall make the effort, anyhow. Next time I am in the neighbourhood I shall essay the adventure. At any rate, I shall not be the only man who has made a sentimental journey.

How well I remember that garden! It was not a large domain: just an oblong stretch of grass with a gravel walk down each side, bordered with beds of

On Going Back

flowers and shrubs; an elderberry tree in one corner, a walnut tree in another, and a pear tree in the next-door garden whose branches hung sufficiently near us on one side to drop a few delicious pears upon our grass border, where they were gathered up rapturously by two lads who had generous and expansive notions of the rights of property.

There were certain shrubs which were the leafy home of scores of currant moths—delicate, ghostly-looking things with speckled wings, which flitted about in aimless fashion, especially at dusk, perishing belike with the day.

There were many worms, too, in our garden. I had a singular partiality for worms in those days which I am thankful to say is now extinct. In wet weather they came to the surface in battalions. There used to be a rockery also, the moist haunt of hundreds of snails. I did not approve of snails, and used to exterminate them by pouring salt over them as they crawled about, leaving shiny, glistening tracks upon the grey stones. The salt had the rather dramatic effect of making the snails withdraw into their shells and exude a bubbling, yellow froth, most gruesome to behold, as if they had partaken of a strong emetic. But the remedy, though drastic and merciless, was effective, and the rockery became a sort of molluscous graveyard.

I well remember Mr. Castle, the gardener. He was a short, burly man, with immense breadth of beam. When he bent down to gather weeds, he extinguished a considerable part of the landscape.

On Going Back

He lived in a nursery at the end of the garden. He made his appearance in our gay parterres in dramatic fashion by scaling the brick wall on a couple of short ladders. It was one of my childish delights to watch for his coming, and, even though I was eagerly expecting him, the sight of his head, crowned with a rusty, battered hat, slowly rising above the coping of the wall, would create a flutter in my bosom, as if he had been a burglar with dark lantern and life preserver all complete. But he never had anything more scarifying than a spade, a rake, or a hoe, and was one of the mildest of men.

I once got a genuine fright in our old garden. It made me distrust the friendliness of the universe. It was one day when I ran full tilt into a vast spider's web spun between two shrubs. The spider himself—a huge, fat, hairy monster as black as night—was reposing in the middle of it. When I disturbed his rest, he ran with incredible nimbleness all over my face; and when I felt his gossamer home with all its threads creeping over my skin and clinging to my nose, I let out a yell like an Indian war-whoop, and was certain that all the spiders in creation were scuttling over me. It was some days before I got over my terror, and even as I think of it now the old horror revives.

I have said that the garden was quite small, but to me in those far-off days it seemed enormous. I suppose this is a common illusion of childhood—the contrast between one's own diminutive person and the vastness of the great world around. If I went

On Going Back

back now, I have no doubt I should look on the familiar scene with a feeling of wonder that it should once have so deceived and overwhelmed my senses. Everything seemed big and distant then. Our dining-room conveyed an idea of immeasurable space. Time was endless: each day was a lifetime. I suppose there were twelve hours in the day, but life was not measured by ticks of the clock. In like manner it seemed an incredible distance to the end of the garden. I saw everything in the large. I often wish the days were as long now, and that the sun might stand still in the valley of Ajalon.

There used to be a little room opening just off the dining-room—hardly a room; more like a tiny stone cell with bare plastered walls, from which a flight of stone steps led down into the garden. I remember the smell of this cell—a damp, mildewy smell, something like the pungent earthy fragrance of a hot-house—not unpleasant at all, but conveying somehow a hint of mystery. The white walls of the cell were gradually covered with pencil marks. It was our measuring-room. My father used to record our heights at regular intervals with intense interest. He would take my brother and me with him into the cell, and make us stand straight up with our backs against the wall; then, with a book or a magazine placed across the top of our heads, he would carefully note the spot to which we had reached, and with a pencil draw a line and duly append our initials and a note of the day and month and year. This was done regularly as a religious rite. It was

On Going Back

impressive to see our rapidly-extending inches figured on the plaster, until at last the wall became full of pencilled ladders and inscriptions denoting our climbing years.

It is easy to grow faddling and sentimental over going back to certain places. There have been so many changes—changes in the place, in the people of the place, in one's self most of all. Wordsworth has written with unfailing skill and unerring insight of the flight of early raptures, of the fading of impressions, of the light of common day, when the glamour has gone and the romance has vanished. And he goes on to console himself with the compensations of the years, “the years that bring the philosophic mind.”

I do not think the philosophic mind is to be compared for a single moment with the fine, careless, irresponsible rapture and impressionability of a boy; but they are not meant to be set over against each other in invidious distinction. The happy thing is that we have both of them if we live long enough and grow up healthily and wisely—the joy and the glamour of youth and the riper wisdom of advancing years.

Besides, advancing years do not necessarily imply the loss of youth. “Whom the gods love die young.” I fancy that saying is often grievously misunderstood. Men quote it of Burns, of Shelley, of Keats, of many a genius, many a bright spirit, cut off before his prime. But I think what the familiar saying really means is that whom the gods love die young when-

On Going Back

ever they die—at twenty-one or at ninety. There is some sense in that, some inspiration. The other interpretation is a dismal croak, and does no credit to the gods.

I am not at all sure, either, about that other phrase, "the light of common day." The poet seems to use it in a sad and deprecating way, as if the light of common day absorbed or superseded some greater glory. But I do not know of any much greater glory than the light of common day. It seems to me a very glorious light. And is there really such a thing as a common day in any deprecating sense? I doubt it. The day never becomes common until a man loses the sense of wonder and surprise. When that is lost the whole man is lost. The day becomes common then, indeed, because the man himself has become vulgarized, materialized, debased. Surprise is certainly an element or quality belonging to youth; but what if youth persists? What if Peter Pan be no myth, but a gleaming fact of life? If I ever cease to be surprised at the universe, at the extraordinary position in which I find myself, at the whole exciting adventure of life, it is time the grass grew over me. The light of common day, indeed! No, no. Not while the dawn returns punctually and flushes with rose the mountain-tops of life.

A COUNTRY COTTAGE

I HAVE had many ambitions in my time, some good, some bad, some feasible, and some preposterous; but the years have been slowly sifting and eliminating them, until now only one remains. It is to live in a cottage in the country, and devote myself to the reading and writing of books.

It is not an immodest ambition. Indeed, I venture to think it is a commendable desire, and one which ought not to be impossible of attainment. Before the Kaiser knocked the bottom out of the world it would certainly have been possible; but now? Well, I don't look for much in the way of luxury. I could live very simply; I don't eat much; I care little for appearances; and if I could see my way to make both ends meet, I would be prepared to take a few risks.

Of course, I have consulted the Only Woman who matters about it, and I rejoice to say that the O.W. emphatically agrees with me—one of the very few things on which she does agree with me. There is such a thing as progress by differentiation, happiness through unlikeness. I once told a young lady that I had heard a famous public man declare that he and his wife were "one in every thought." She gazed at me a moment with horror-stricken eyes, and then exclaimed: "How awful!" Quite so. The

A Country Cottage

idea crossed my own mind at the same instant, but it might not have been prudent to disclose it. The O.W. and myself are not by any means one in every thought ; and that, I shrewdly suspect, is the reason why we have had such a jolly time together. But she is one with me in this : she has a desire to live in the country ; she loves solitude and silence and the poetry of distance. Perhaps she would not put it quite in that way ; but that is what her feeling amounts to. So does mine. Hence we shall have no serious conflict over this important business. When the propitious hour strikes, we shall quietly slip the cable that binds us to our present bearings, and set sail for the Eldorado of our dreams.

Now this is not a fad, nor is it a piece of fatuous sentimentality, still less is it an unheroic evasion of responsibilities ; it is simply a belated response to the call of the blood. I am persuaded that if I could go far enough back in my ancestry I should come upon a hill-man, a man of the moors and the streams, a haunter of quiet woods, a wanderer in green pastures and beside still waters. He appears to me in my dreams. He is involved in all my thoughts. I hear his voice when the house is wrapped in slumber, or when walking home beneath the stars. His presence has been with me even more insistently and palpably when my foot has been ringing on hard pavements, and my mind has been distracted with the roar of unending traffic, and my eyes and nostrils have been assailed with the reek of city fogs and all-pervading petrol, and I have been

A Country Cottage

jostled by crowds in "the ebb and flow of streets." At such times my friendly hill-man has whispered to me: "Never mind, old fellow; you've got to go through this just now and endure it as best you can. It is your apprenticeship, your novitiate; but our time will come!" And at such times, like as in *The Reverie of Poor Susan*, I have seen—

"A mountain ascending, a vision of trees,

* * * * *

And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,

The one only dwelling on earth that she loves."

We don't want to go and bury ourselves, the O.W. and I. Not at all. We are not misanthropic persons. But we both want—and are determined, if only we can break the tightening coil of circumstance—to do one or two things before we die, which we cannot possibly do without the friendly aid of the Spirit of Adventure. Given our health, we have made up our minds about it. She wants to keep fowls and bees and a goat, possibly a pig; also to potter about in a small sequestered garden, cultivating her flowers and bringing on her vegetables and coaxing her fruit trees. I want to write my books. I can't write them in pandemonium; I must have an annexe of paradise in the shape of a cottage in the country. Give me a good fountain pen, some decent paper, a few favourite books, sufficient baccy, and a reliable bicycle, and I could be happy as the day is long. No, we are not anchorites. We have decided that the cottage must be within reasonable distance of a good town, a thriving, bustling, stirring

A Country Cottage

city. The O.W. wants to see the shops now and then. I want to be near a library. Both of us want periodically a little Bohemian recreation. We do not snort at civilization.

I was born in a London suburb, with an uninterrupted view of the opposite side of the street; and early associations and ingrained habits are not easily uprooted. The first sounds I remember with any degree of vividness are not of morning birds or falling waters, but the cries of costers, the shouts of errand-boys, the clang of church bells, the clamour of barrel-organs, the clatter of carts. I have loved London—many happy hours have been lived there; I love it still. I like the stir of it. I enjoy the sense of its importance. I thrill to its immensity. But it is the loneliest place in the world, and I want the friendlier solitude of the country to balance matters.

I should like the cottage to be in the neighbourhood of hills, with a stretch of rolling moorland not far away; a small loch, if possible, within half a mile or so; failing that, a running stream, full of glistening stones and wet boulders, with quiet brown pools here and there where trout may lurk; also a wood near the house, a pine-wood for preference, but a wood in any case, for there are few things more friendly than trees.

The cottage itself must stand back from the road, and must be off the beaten track; it should be on high land, where the winds blow fresh and sweet, but not too steep, for the O.W. is none of your amazonian sloggers, and she must not climb breath-

A Country Cottage

less to her own wee “but-and-ben.” The roof-tree should be sheltered by the shoulder of a neighbourly hill, or by a clump of trees to break the winter storms. I would like a verandah or a stoep, but we can’t have everything; a small porch would do, if I can get nothing better. There should be a stone-flagged path, a crazy pavement, from the gate to the house door, with green blades growing between the crevices and a suspicion of moss along the borders.

The interior is to be quite plain, with very simple furnishings. One good living-room, with a big old-fashioned fireplace, roomy hobs, and an iron hook for the kettle; an open fire—none of your black bars and plaguy bottoms that are always falling down, or getting cracked, or going awry, but a plain open hearth where a fire of logs and peat can be built up, and raked together at night, and left to glow, like Vestal lamps, if need be, for a century. There should be a pleasant view from the window, and it must face the south. A small kitchen adjoining, where cooking could be done and things washed up. A good solid table with no rheumatism in the legs; a few ordinary chairs and a couple of real cosy ones; a dresser with blue plates and brass candlesticks displayed; a grandfather clock with not too loud a tick and a mellow strike—that’s about all, I think, for furniture. No sofa, I prithee, O.W., certainly not a horsehair one; but maybe a comfortable window-seat, where we could sit and watch the twilight creeping up the glen and keep a vigilant look-out for the postman in the morning. Three

A Country Cottage

bedrooms would suffice, including a guest-chamber, of course; that is to be one of the charms of the whole project, to have friends down to stay.

And the garden—ah, I dare not trust my pen to describe its beauties, and when I mention it to the O.W. she looks so longing for it all that I have not the heart to pursue the subject. But it will be of the kind about which T. E. Brown has written:

“A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot !
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Ferned grot—
The veriest school
Of peace ; and yet the fool
Contends that God is not—
Not God ! in gardens ! when the eve is cool ?
Nay, but I have a sign ;
'Tis very sure God walks in mine.”

I can see the O.W. pottering about there, gathering her posies for the table, trimming her borders, planting her bulbs, strewing crumbs for the birds, attending to her bees, milking the goat, diving into the hen-house for eggs. The grass will be my care, and the fetching and carrying of logs and peat, and the going for water to the well. Oh, I can smell the peat-reek now as the blue smoke goes curling up our own lum ! I am sure I shall be able to write something worth reading in that cottage.

What is it to be called ? My mind is not fertile about names; but the O.W. (bless her!) says it shall be “Druim,” which she tells me is Gaelic for “The Dream.”

RUNNING WATER

I HAVE been reading over again of late the letters of R. L. S. What a treasury they are of wisdom, courage, gaiety, and fun ; and what a wonderful revelation of the red-ripe heart of the man !

A passage in one of them, just a charming little bit of description thrown in by the way, set me thinking about the music around us in the outward world, all the pleasant noises of Nature. Here it is :

“A little faint talk of waves upon the beach ; the wild strange crying of seagulls over the sea ; and the hoarse wood-pigeons and shrill sweet robins full of their autumn love-making among the trees, made up a delectable concerto of peaceful noises.”

The letter was written in September, 1873, and the scene of this “delectable concerto” was on the sea sands between Granton and Queensferry.

I believe that the ear needs to be attuned to these “peaceful noises,” trained to catch the undercurrents of sweet sound ; otherwise they are drowned in the turmoil of the grosser and less agreeable noises of humanity. Even when one is “far from the madding crowd,” the ear is still preoccupied with its customary din—the clatter of traffic, the hum of machinery, the scream of engines, the roar of trains ; and “the silence of the glens” does not at once yield

Running Water

up its whispering cadences to those used to “the ebb and flow of streets.”

Nature is never really silent to those who have learned to listen. Even on the quietest day, when the lazy earth seems to lie asleep in the drowsy warmth of the summer sun, there is music to be heard. An invisible orchestra of many diverse instruments is breathing a symphony for him who bends to hear. A hot puff of wind makes a sudden rustle in the corn. A stronger breeze makes a sibilant hiss along the dry grass. Out of the distance comes the murmur of bees in the blue. Now one catches the thin attenuated trumpet of the gnat; now the shrill, husky note of the grasshopper.

I stayed at a farm-house once in spring. Never was such a continuous concourse of “peaceful noises.” Cocks awoke the morning echoes with their strident cries; the cuckoo sent his twofold shout out of the woods all day; cows lowed in the meadows; pigs grunted in their sties; horses whinnied in their stalls; pigeons cooed about the loft; hens clucked in the yard; dogs barked in the kennels; blackbirds and mavises whistled out of every bush; the maid sang in the dairy over her milk-pails—from the hour of waking to the moment of sleep there were sounds to charm the ear and to bring pleasant thoughts to the mind.

I like that lovely soothing sound of the wind in the tops of the pines. It is like the surging of a distant sea. There is a pine-wood in the north where I have sat for hours, as in some vast and dim cathedral,

Running Water

listening to the persistent tossing and murmuring as the wind has gently rocked the invisible spires of green far overhead; while, down below, the tall, straight pillars in the still aisles stand motionless, undisturbed by the flurry and commotion going on so far above their feet. Now and again a cone will fall with a soft thud upon the mossy ground, or a handful of last year's leaves will be caught up in a straying waft of breeze, and perform a sudden dance about the brown trunks, or run for a few yards with a swift, dry patter across a stretch of more open ground.

Some people do not like to hear the wind. To them it has an intimidating and menacing sound. It makes them feel melancholy and forlorn. They draw closer to the fire with an involuntary shudder, and think of wild nights at sea. But what a musician the wind is! He can produce such an extraordinary variety of sounds, from the deep organ note of storm to the shrill pipe that sings in the rigging or whines through a crack in the door. Sometimes he will wail over a wide moor in the late autumn like a lost soul. Sometimes he will rumble in the chimney or beneath the eaves as if he were rolling cannon-balls down an interminable staircase. Sometimes he advances with a bellow out of the tumultuous ground-swell of the distant valley, and makes a pounce upon the walls of the house, shaking them to their foundations. Many a time I have lain awake at night hearing him shear the walls as if he would rip every vestige of creeper or climbing plant from their

Running Water

crevices, or tear the very plaster and mortar from the stones.

I do not feel the melancholy of the wind, but I do feel intensely the melancholy of the sea. I think the most desolating and woebegone sound in Nature is that long-drawn retreating roar of waves along some shingly coast, when the rounded stones and pebbles run after one another with a hollow noise that seems to beat upon the heart until it is tired. To hear that in some lonely place under cold grey skies makes me so abysmally sad and desperate that I am ready—

“ Swift to be hurled
Anywhere, anywhere
Out of the world.”

It is the apotheosis of desolation.

But of all the alluring sounds and pleasant noises of Nature, I think the most musical, the most soothing, the most completely captivating and satisfying, is that of running water. One of the most exquisite lines in poetry, expressing in its very language the sound it describes, is that of W. B. Yeats in *The Isle of Innisfree* :

“ I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore.”

I heard that sound one summer night at Capel Curig, and it seems as if I heard it still. It was one of those quiet, breathless nights, so still that the ping of a midge seemed to be a rude invasion of the silence. A light scarf of mist trailed over the dark bosom of Snowdon ; the stars seemed to drip down their light from a cloudless sky ; a new moon lay

Running Water

like a thin shaving over the blackness of a neighbouring wood. I walked to and fro with a friend upon the white road that borders two small lakes there, and the water kept wimpling and washing over the brown stones on the shore so gently and so musically, with such a deliciously cool and soothing sound, that we both stood again and again to hearken, and talked almost in whispers, fearing to profane so holy and so sweet a silence.

Then there is that most haunting verse of Coleridge, than which I know of nothing in the whole realm of poetry more filled with indescribable enchantment :

“ Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the skylark sing,
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning.
And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute,
And now it is an angel's song,
That makes the heavens be mute.
It ceased : yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.”

I think of that “ nameless trickle that springs in the green bosom of Allermuir, and threads the moss under the Shearers' Knowe,” and of the long, lean, dreamy-eyed youth who loved to wander there and sit by the overhanging rock above the pool making “bad verses.”

Running Water

I think of the well of St. Duthac, colder on the hottest day of summer than the Beadsman's fingers on St. Agnes's Eve, ever running, running, running from the heights of the hills until it drops into the brown pool of the spring that sings between the grasses and mosses at the roadside.

I think of the rippling stream that follows the wayfarer down to the shore of Lee Bay in North Devon until it is lost among the stones and boulders where it vanishes into the blue waters of the Bristol Channel.

But of all the running water I have ever known, that of the Lyn at Lynmouth is the most enchanting. I have sat by it the livelong day in the summers of my boyhood, watching the salmon leap the glittering fall, and the shadowy trout dart like an arrow through the pool near the moss-grown rock, and the frogs swimming with quick, nervous jerks across the clear stream to the green bank beyond; and all day long the dreamy sound of rushing water never ceases, but seems to become one with the steady beating of one's heart.

There is a fall there that goes roaring into a deep tawny pool in a lather of foam, creaming and eddying away to the gloom of the bank where the ferns grow thickly, and the sunlight makes splashes of golden colour, and the trees make moving shadows of lace-work upon the water; and after a day spent within earshot of its thunder it has become a part of my very being as I walked and dreamed in that fairyland of beauty.

Running Water

In the *Life and Letters of Stopford Brooke* there is a singular passage describing the spell cast upon his mind by running water, and how he would sit musing beside a certain stream, listening to the enchantment of its music. And while he sat there a water sprite appeared to him in the form of a beautiful maiden, with whom he would hold long and intimate converse. It sounds like the merest moonshine to the unimaginative mind; but the incident interested me enormously, for it reminded me of the long, far-off days when I used to muse by the waters of the rushing Lyn, and watched the rainbows forming and dancing in the spray, and felt the friendliness of Nature in my very bones. It is true I never saw a water sprite in those dreaming hours; but if ever such a being might have taken shape and appeared to me, it was in those summer days when I thought long, long thoughts by the streams of glorious Devon.

THE HUMOURS OF A FARM

A FARM is a tonic for body and mind. It takes one away from the beaten track and transports one to a new world. The substitution of grass for pavements and animals for business acquaintances is an awakening and delectable experience.

I stayed at a farm once in the English Midlands in spring, and the memory of it is fragrant still, though 'tis now "forty years on." The cuckoo fluted all day in the surrounding woods with a persistency suggestive of the perseverance of the saints. All the cuckoos in creation seemed to be concentrated in those bowers of green. The bees were loud in the garden as they hurried to and fro on their own private ends, burying themselves in the cups of flowers, revelling in colour and fragrance, dusting their hairy thighs with pollen, "making honey all the day."

The family appetites were enormous. But the meals of a certain ploughboy on the farm were fabulous. He had his food served in a basin of immense size; it overflowed with a jorum of extraordinary complexity; he absorbed the contents with an ease and a gusto most pleasant, though staggering, to behold. It gave the spectator a new impression of the elasticity and capacity of the human frame.

The Humours of a Farm

There is a certain companionableness about a farm that seems to enlarge one's circle of friends to vast proportions. Every living creature in the place comes touting for favours. You find yourself unconsciously absorbing all sorts of new and unaccustomed lore. The idiosyncrasies of the various animals present themselves unobtrusively to observation.

I have come to the conclusion that ducks have more character than hens. They view the world in a more robust and virile fashion. They are more full-blooded and aggressive. They seem to have decided opinions of their own, and if challenged could offer a reasoned view of the universe.

Hens are tentative and futile creatures. They strut and scrape and amble with all the dainty and polite demeanour of a Victorian dancing school. They peer and peck with a lady-like inquisitiveness. They are snappers-up of unconsidered trifles. They spend their lives in a ceaseless hunt for buried treasure without any of the qualifications needful for the adventure. Their discoveries are made with a dilettante air, discoveries which are altogether disproportionate to the fuss and flurry of the expedition.

I like the pompous self-importance of ducks. It is endlessly amusing. They magnify their office. I have watched them forming fours with a quite military precision, or waddling down the hill-side in single file with portentous solemnity, looking exactly like some absurd ecclesiastical procession. They are intent on mighty business. They have a portly

The Humours of a Farm

leader, perfectly swollen with priestly pretension, clad in the snowiest of surplices, whose majestic air and measured pace seem to communicate themselves to the rest of the preposterous retinue. He hath a guttural utterance, emitting a kind of Gregorian chant from the depths of his capacious abdomen—a ventriloquial performance suggestive of vast internal content and satisfaction.

The whole procession is bound for the spring, which gushes out perennially from the cool grass, bubbling with crystal clearness, and falling with a musical tinkle into a small circular basin of brown glistening stones. Here the procession halts; the leader lifts up his voice as with the sound of a great Amen; the whole general assembly falls to throaty discussion, liquidating their bills the while in the flowing stream.

The hens are not at all ecclesiastical. They exercise a strictly *lay* ministry. They are permitted to roam at large. Consequently, they have developed a reprehensible habit of depositing eggs in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. We try to calculate the vicinity of the achievement by the location of the triumphant cackle. It is not always successful, and probably we have more than once overlooked a nest tucked away under a whin-bush or among the yellow broom.

The hens have names of their own. Here is Lucy, scrabbling in a dust-heap; this is Jessie, intent on offal; yonder is Harriet, mincing along in search of what she may devour. It is an unfortunate system

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of nomenclature, too human in its genial suggestiveness ; and the family undergo distinct internal qualms when, on a certain day, a fowl is set upon the table at dinner with a dreadful familiarity about the legs, and the general appetite is sensibly diminished when a vociferous intimation from Percy (who has no bowels of compassion) offers the melancholy news that Lucy has undergone a violent and untimely demise. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

There are cows on the farm, of course. You may see them munching at the thick grass in the meadow, or chewing a meditative cud as they lie blinking in the warm sunshine of an afternoon. They always look cool and refreshing. Their broad, blunt noses glisten in the sun ; and they blow sweet breath as they gaze at you with big, mild eyes.

But somehow I am not fond of cows. Their anatomy depresses me. It is too bony to be comfortable. They are all corners. The hind-quarters of a cow remind me of a hat-rack. You feel inclined to hang up your overcoat and look round absently for the umbrella-stand. The series of knobs protruding from the brown skin is distressing to a humane person. I have no doubt it is all right ; the beast is meant to be like that. But, all the same, I cannot help wishing that the general effect was less skeletonian.

The goats are great fun. But they are dour brutes. Whenever I see a goat I think of Robinson Crusoe. If his goat was anything like the goats of my acquaintance, he—saintly man—must have

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affrighted his isle from its propriety by the quality and variety of his imprecations.

I have helped to milk a goat—that is to say, I have held the miserable creature by the horns while the milking was being done. My arms were nearly torn from their sockets, and, like Mr. Squeers after being assaulted by Nicholas, my body was “a mask of bruises.” The goat was a venerable-looking person, and ought to have known better. She was “bearded like the pard,” and might have sat for the portrait of one of the Patriarchs. If the Patriarchs had as much trouble with their goats as I had with mine, their longevity is truly surprising. My goat was always “taking the sturdies.” Once, having yielded her quota of milk, she turned round and looked contemptuously at the result, and deliberately kicked over the pail. Sometimes she declined to be caught until I had careered all over the field, and was in that parlous state of mind when a man rends his clothes. At last, when I had her safely by the horns, she would bend her stubborn neck this way and that, bucking furiously with her hind-legs; then she and I together would revolve in an eccentric circle for a quarter of an hour, while Maria, resigned and patient, chivied her round and round with an expectant bucket. I do not like goats. They have prominent and sinister eyes. They look at you with an uncanny gaze. I do not wonder at their being used in weird and secret rites and obscene and barbaric ceremonials.

We had one really dreadful experience when our two pigs escaped. As luck would have it, it was a

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Sunday, and I do not remember ever to have witnessed a more unsabbatic performance. The whole afternoon we were chasing those unhappy pigs, trying by lure or by violence to induce them to come back to their forsaken sty. At least a dozen excited and perspiring people went plunging after the fugitives down gullies, through bushes, over fields, in gardens, hedge-bottoms, and ditches. Uncle John, who is a scientific man, said that it was quite a simple matter to catch a pig. He said he had often done it. All you had to do, he told us, was to catch hold of the animal by one of its hind-legs and hang on to it. This sounded a good scheme; but Uncle John did not solve the problem of how to get near enough to the pig to do this. He might as well have suggested dropping some salt on its curly tail. Once I made sure I had got him, right in the middle of a thick undergrowth of broom. It was a leg right enough; I was sure of that. But a sudden squeal of distinctly human quality made me let go. It was the dairy-maid, who had gone into the bush after the pig on her hands and knees. Apology was difficult, and, much abashed, I abandoned the hunt.

A HOLIDAY AFLOAT

IF a tired man wants a thorough rest and complete change, there is nothing to beat a few days at sea, sailing up the West Coast of Scotland. There is comfortable accommodation aboard; good plain food, and plenty of it; nothing to worry about; no correspondence to bother you; no newspaper to take away your appetite; magnificent scenery to engage the eye at every turn; pleasant company to beguile the time. No doubt much depends upon the weather and a smooth sea, and a consequent absence of revolution in the interior; but given these happy conditions, you can give yourself up to a week's uninterrupted and unalloyed enjoyment.

We boarded the *Claymore* at the Broomielaw at a few minutes before eleven, and by a quarter past that hour we were slowly swinging out into mid-stream. A bevy of belated passengers rushed aboard at the last moment; then the gangways were run ashore, a bell sounded, the siren gave a couple of hoarse hoots, the engines began to throb, the water churned astern, and we were fairly away.

The Clyde is a wonderful river—dirty, but industrious; occasionally fragrant, but always fascinating. The shipyards are a never-failing source of interest. An iron clangour resounds incessantly everywhere,

A Holiday Afloat

reverberating from a hundred hulls. Vast vessels in various stages of completion slope upon the "slips." Strange names appear on great steamers alongside the wharves, bringing a curious sensation of immense distances and interminable leagues of water, along with odours and pictures of foreign ports and lands. In many parts the banks of the river seem to be a jungle of wooden piles and scaffoldings and iron girders, looking like fretwork in the distance. Farther down, beautiful mansions begin to appear, with a background of fair woods and a frontage of green meadows.

At Greenock there was a long stay, loading up cargo. The activity of the dockers was a miracle. There was a crowd of them on the pier, standing with their hands in their pockets, looking as if they loved work and longed to get at it. It was the dinner-hour, and not a man would stir before the time was up. Then a galvanic movement communicated itself to the assembly, and a few men began to saunter about and to lift things with an infinite tenderness. It took three men to wheel a barrow. Probably they were not strong. Perhaps they were just off a strike and were not thoroughly convalescent. We all marvelled at the prosperity and enterprise of the British Empire.

The voyage proceeded steadily after leaving Greenock. We passed Arran in the evening. The jagged peaks about Sannox stood out boldly against the sky. The lonely pyramid of Ailsa Craig appeared upon our left. Towards eleven o'clock we were

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rounding the Mull of Kintyre, where the waves often play havoc with otherwise unblemished reputations and reduce the loftiest intellects to abysmal gloom. But beyond a gentle heave there was nothing to-night to distress the most susceptible midriff, and we glided along upon an even keel.

I went to bed soon after eleven. My berth was in the saloon, at the far end, in the part lugubriously termed "The Graveyard." Indeed, the term was not inappropriate. It was even more like a morgue. About ten of us were laid out on shelves. My shelf was, unfortunately, an under one. I had to climb over a fixed table to get into it, and could only insert myself into it by instalments. Having seated yourself on the table, you had to get your feet down first, then your knees, until you came to the more rotund and mountainous parts of the body. These were extremely difficult to negotiate, and you were lucky if you managed the disposal of your bulk without a bruise or an abrasion somewhere. By this time you were hanging half in and half out of your shelf, in a state of suspended animation, as it were. The final problem was to get your head inside without producing a bump hitherto unknown to phrenology or reducing the organ of veneration to zero. You managed this by gradually lowering your upper storey down into the pillow end of the shelf, until at last you lay full length, exhausted and breathing heavily, with your face about four inches from the shelf above you.

The man above me snored continuously. The

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man next to him appeared to have some bronchial difficulty, and bubbled and sizzled like bacon in a pan :

“As he had fritters frying in his throat.”

I lay for some time listening to the nasal and guttural chorus round about. A sleepy voice from the opposite side at length remarked : “Not so much snoring in the cemetery.” The observation was not without effect, and I noticed that the bubbling gentleman was not quite so oleaginous as he was before.

The night in June is never quite dark in these latitudes. My last glimpse of the porthole about one in the morning showed a violet hue outside, and with that disc of twilight in my gathering dreams I fell asleep.

I was roused by the noise of churning water and a rattling of chains and trampling feet on the deck. I looked at my watch : it was 4.30. I got up, and found we were at Oban. What a morning it was ! Sun, sky, sea, mountain, wood, all were inconceivably lovely. I do not know which entranced me most—the delicate green of Kerrera, the purple of Mull, the silver grey of Morven. The sun rose higher and gathered strength ; land and sea began to swim in a haze of rose and gold. Oban itself looked small, mean, empty, soiled, second-hand, and tenth-rate, compared with the glory around. That preposterous ruined circus on the hill-top in the background completed the impression of human folly and futility.

No shaving was possible before breakfast ; the traffic was too congested. After breakfast we arrived

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at Mull. We stopped at Craignure; the *Claymore* emitted a prolonged hoot that echoed among the mountains. Presently two figures appeared outside a distant cottage, leisurely making their way to the jetty, busily adjusting buttons as they went along. Evidently we had just aroused them from their beds. They came off shore in a broad-bottomed boat, and our crew began to haul up bags of flour and other things from the depths of the hold. One of the men in the boat was an old white-bearded fellow, and it was amusing to see him carefully dragging on an old suit of dungaree overalls before touching a sack or a packing-case, lest he should soil his best trousers. Small incidents amuse and interest amazingly among a ship's company on a holiday voyage like this. We become more unsophisticated, and can enjoy the simple things of life.

There was a baby on board who aroused much interest. He and his mother had travelled straight from Nairobi in East Africa to see his grandfather at some tiny hamlet in Mull. To think of it! The romance of it! The infant seemed quite indifferent to the sensation he was creating. He was speechless but beaming, and waggled a chubby hand at everybody in turn, like a microscopic Pooh Bah saying loftily: "How de do, little girls, how de do?" It was a great bore, but he did it. The baby was a plump, good-humoured specimen of his kind, and his disembarkation was a scene of immense enthusiasm on the part of his feminine admirers. Soon after this excitement we put in at Tobermory, where we

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had three or four hours, and strolled up to see a pretty waterfall and a tweed factory and a distillery, and sent picture postcards to our friends.

Presently we sailed into an enchanted region. Islands began to gather all around us. We saw Staffa like a tiny cloud on the far horizon ; Tiree and Coll ; the wonderful Scaur of Eigg ; the towering mountains of Rum ; the low, long stretch of Canna ; beyond, and over all, the glorious hills of Skye. We put in at Eigg, and again at Mallaig. At Mallaig we went ashore for an hour, and then made straight for Armadale in Skye. There is nothing to equal this part of the voyage, where the vessel passes through the Sound of Sleat and through the Narrows between the mainland and Skye. It is a romantic region. The very name of Skye arouses a score of memories of story and legend and poem, while the scenic grandeur of the island is unsurpassed by anything in this country. The mountains seemed to be ever shifting their position as the steamer wound through the Kyles.

At Isle Ornsay three white-bearded patriarchs came out with a boat, and loaded it up with goods and an immense quantity of timber for a house. It seemed as if the boat must topple over, so high was it piled with planks and cases.

We reached Kyle of Lochalsh in the evening, and lay alongside the pier for the night. A destroyer was in the strait ; a concertina, vigorously played, sounded pleasantly from its upper deck ; a few sailors were dancing merrily to its music. The night here

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was even lighter than at Kintyre; I could read a newspaper with ease at midnight. I managed to corkscrew myself into my lower shelf with less difficulty than on the first night; perhaps with practice I might have dived in head first over the table.

We left Kyle at eleven next day and made for Broadford, where we stayed an hour or so, and then came to Portree, where we remained four hours. We fished with a line from the boat, but with indifferent success; we visited the tweed mills, where we saw the cloth being woven from the raw material with most ingenious machinery. The last port of call in Skye was Staffin Bay, where another large cargo was loaded up in a boat that came off shore. We then made a bee-line for Gairloch, and stayed there for the night. Gairloch is very lovely, much more thickly wooded than any other part we had hitherto seen; but it had its scourge, for we were nearly eaten up by midges. Next day we sailed north, stopping here and there until we reached Ullapool, where again we put in for the night. Here, to my sorrow, I had to leave my friends on board and sleep ashore, in order to get home for the week-end. The motor with the mails took me to Garve and the train to Inverness, thence to Glasgow and the chimney-stacks. But I saw none of these things, for my mind's eye was looking on the mountains of Mull and Skye, and the blue waters of calm and peaceful Kyles.

A PENTLAND WALK

I HAD long wanted to have a tramp over the Pentland Hills, but it was not until a December day in 1917 that an opportunity was afforded. December is not the best month for a ramble, but Nature was kind that day. There was a nip of frost in the air; a thin, powdery snow whitened the shoulders of the Pentlands; the sky was blue—not a deep blue, but pale and washed out, as if it had been up too late the night before and had not slept well; and there was a watery gleam of sunshine with no heat in it, but affording sufficient brightness to make a walk inviting. A wintry breeze blew fitfully with a hint of snow in it, and the streets were swept every now and then with a strong gust that made a sudden commotion among the dried leaves in the gardens, and caused a dance of dust and vagrant bits of paper at certain exposed corners.

The Professor and I had mapped out our programme the night before, and we discussed it afresh over our breakfast, gloating over the prospect. By consummate good fortune the Professor knew the owner of Swanston Cottage, and had obtained his kind and cordial permission for us to visit that romantic spot. It was Swanston we agreed to make for first, and then, having steeped ourselves in the Stevensonian atmosphere by worshipping at the

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shrine, to climb the hills in search of a particular spot dearly beloved and longed for by both of us, and then to round off the day by a descent into Colinton to view the Manse. With this appetizing adventure before us we set off a little after nine o'clock in the direction of the Braid Hills.

The walk from the car terminus to Swanston is about three miles. All the way the undulating outline of the Pentlands is before the eye, gradually growing larger and more imposing in bulk until steep Caerketton towers above in a beetling brow of rock. Swanston village lies hidden in a fold of the hills, nestling at the very foot, and Swanston Cottage stands back from the road with the cliff-like front of Caerketton uprearing boldly before its front windows.

Here the Professor and I wandered idly in the garden, not saying much, but with our thoughts busy in the same line. We were recalling passages from the essays in which these places found such loving and happy description ; in our mind's eye we were seeing the spare figure of a youth with long hair, deep brown wide-set eyes, hatless, in a velveteen coat, flitting about the garden ; we remembered his childish ploys, his incessant toil, his frail health, his adventurous spirit ; we saw him setting forth, like ourselves, for a day on the hills. He haunted the whole region for us, seemed actually to accompany our steps, halted when we halted, acted as guide, philosopher, and friend throughout the day. There was a man digging in the garden, but it was not old Andrew Fairservice ; but it was something, thought

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I, to be privileged to talk with his successor. This was the very same garden, anyhow, "in the lap of the hill, with its rocks overgrown with clematis, its shadowy walks, and the splendid breadth of champaign that one saw from the north-west corner." Here was the very summer-house where R. L. S. used to sit, eternally practising the art of letters; and we sat within its shade and dreamed.

We went into the house itself, saw Stevenson's own room, with a view of the hills to make a poet lyrical and an artist despair; dear old Cummy's room, full of portraits and autographs and letters; pictures of Stevenson everywhere; the old chest that belonged once to the infamous Deacon Brodie—oh, a dozen things that made our hearts beat; and we found ourselves involuntarily glancing at each other now and then, to see the same thought reflected in each face, "He will be here presently; nay, he is here now."

I don't know how we tore ourselves away, but we did. And all the time we were there my head was full of St. Ives escaping from Edinburgh Castle and his arrival at Swanston; of the exile in Samoa; of how that spirit of air and fire haunted these rooms, this garden, these hills, the distant city; of that last book of his, *Weir of Hermiston*, written at white heat, and left, an incomparable fragment, on the very morning of his death day; and of how, as he wrote, all this very region was present to his mind as vividly as if he had never left it, and as if six thousand miles of sea did not roll between.

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But we had set our hearts on finding that “nameless trickle that springs in the green bosom of Allermuir, and is fed from Holkerside by a perennial teacupful, and threads the moss under the Shearers’ Knowe, and makes one pool there, overhung by a rock, where I loved to sit and make bad verses, and is then kidnapped in its infancy by subterranean pipes for the service of the sea-beholding city in the plain.” So we fared forth from the enchanted garden, with that ever-friendly Sprite in the velveteen jacket making a shadowy third.

We halted a moment at a shepherd’s cottage at the foot of the hill to inquire the best path. The shepherd himself was not in—he was away on the misty heights with his flock—but we saw his wife, a braw sonsie woman, who told us that she had lived in that cottage for nine years and had never yet set foot upon the hills, and could give us no information. For two men, hero-worshippers of the most romantic kind, who had sallied forth on purpose to survey these memory-haunted heights, this was sufficiently staggering, and we discreetly withdrew, lest on further inquiry she should prove never to have heard of Robert Louis Stevenson, or of John Todd, or of the Nameless Trickle, or of any other association inseparable from our golden quest. The good soul’s life was comprised in washing her doorstep clean, in keeping her house in order, in attending to her husband’s wants; and, indeed, it is a programme sufficient to excuse her from roaming in search of pixies or browsing in Elysian fields. An aeroplane

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hummed overhead as we left the cot and began to climb the hill ; the sunlight glinted on its wings ; we could see the pilot's head a dot against the blue ; it was a reminder of stern and bewildering times, and that there were other adventures than those of romance.

It was long before we found the spot we sought, but I came upon its track, and the Professor confirmed it by the position of two rounded mounds of green like a generous bosom, and we hastened to trace it down to the pool and the overhanging rock. Sure enough they were there ; the place could be no other ; it corresponded exactly to the description ; and we sat down, and thought, and dreamed, and talked in subdued tones of this haunted spot ; and as we sat there we had a glimpse of Arthur's Seat, and the wheeling waters of the Forth, and the cragged and battlemented city miles away, hanging as if in mid-air, with the mist cutting off the scene from the lower earth and leaving it shining in the heavens in a gleam of the wintry sun. How often must those other eyes, so keen and true, have looked upon that vision as we were looking on it now !

The day was beginning to decline when we dropped down into Colinton after a long tramp upon the hills, and found our way to the old Manse. We had tea there in a book-lined room with a window that looked down on to the roaring water of Leith and to the bare woods beyond. Afterwards we wandered in the garden so beloved of Stevenson's childhood. We saw the "sloping lawn, literally

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steeped in sunshine ; and all the day long, from the impending wood, there came the sweetest and fullest chorus of merles and thrushes, and all manner of birds, that it ever was my lot to hear.”

This description is a reminiscence of one of the long summer days he used to spend at Colinton Manse. On this December day the woods were silent ; but we heard them piping in our fancy as we bethought us of this passage. We saw the lilac “that hung its scented blossom out of the glossy semicircle of laurels, identified by my playmates and myself as that tree whose very shadow was death. In the great laurel at the corner I have often lain *perdu*, with a toy gun in my hand, waiting for a herd of antelopes to defile past me down the carriage drive, and waiting (need I add ?) in vain.”

We saw, too, the Water Door, thus described : “Down at the corner of the lawn, next to the snuff-mill wall, there was a practicable passage through the evergreens, and a door in the wall, which let you out on a small patch of sand left in the corner of the river. Just across, the woods rose like a wall into the sky ; and their lowest branches trailed in the black waters.”

We saw the gigantic yew tree, with its pleasing horror of shade, and the Witches’ Walk : “Under the retaining wall was a somewhat darker pathway, extending from the stable to the far end of the garden, and called the Witches’ Walk from a game we used to play in it. . . . Its chief horror was the retaining wall of the kirkyard itself, about which we

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were always hovering at even with the strange attraction of fear. . . . Often after nightfall have I looked long and eagerly from the Manse windows to see the 'spunkies' playing among the graves, and have been much chagrined at my failure."

SLEEPY HOLLOW

FEW writers have a greater old-world charm than Washington Irving, whose famous *Sketch Book* contains some delightful impressions and appreciations of the Old Country. There is a delicate flavour about his style that reminds me of old furniture and rare china, something fanciful and fragrant and romantic, with a free descriptive touch far above the average. A modern reader, fed on journalese, accustomed to the careless and chaotic manner of the unending mob of gentlemen (and ladies) who write with ease, may find him stiff and stilted and affected. They would call him artificial; they would accuse him of a brocaded style, too conscious of itself, too intent on creating an effect, and a meretricious effect at that. But he had an artistic conscience which would not allow him to write in a slovenly and formless fashion, which is more than can be said of the scribes whose productions are measured by the thousand-word standard, to whom painstaking is a folly and conscience a disease.

One of Irving's most exquisite bits of writing is his *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. *Sleepy Hollow!* The very name seems to carry one back to remote ages, when the world stood still and the time was always afternoon. Odd that such a name and such a place (for it is indeed an actual valley) should be found in

Sleepy Hollow

America, the land of the pace that kills, the land of hustle and jazz, the land of skyscrapers, millionaires, inventions, patent medicines, novel religions, and cinema stars. Yet in a land of vast distances and far horizons it would be strange if Nature did not sometimes call to meditation, and the roaring streams of life did not now and then slide into quiet backwaters on whose green and sunny banks men could bask and loaf and dream.

Sleepy Hollow has become a synonym for all that is otiose and lethargic, slumbrous and stagnant. There are places where it would seem incredible that any of the world's business should be done; places where folk are born, marry and are given in marriage, and die comfortably in their beds, wrapt in somnolent complacency; places where men and women, possessed, it must be presumed, of the ordinary stock of emotions, and of the combustible materials of average human nature, glide through life like wraiths in a misty under-world; where the most trivial incidents are invested with enormous and exaggerated importance; where the passing of a vehicle is an event for remark, the arrival of the postman a palpitating excitement, a dog-fight a delirious ecstasy, the appearance of a stranger a domestic earthquake. The scarecrow—airing his fluttering raiment in a ploughed field, dangling his flaccid arms in a paralytic attitude above the scattered seed, rooted like some immemorial tree, standing so tame that the birds whose depredations he is supposed to prevent or restrict regard him as a friend or neigh-

Sleepy Hollow

bour, and come to perch upon his rakish hat or roost upon his crazy and distracted frame—is monarch of all he surveys, a symbol and type of the almost vegetable existence round about him.

In *An Inland Voyage*, Stevenson writes of a certain golden day when he drifted slowly along the sluggish river, too lazy and too impotent to dip his paddle, and watched the landscape shimmering in the heat; watched it through half-closed lids as he lay back in his canoe, until at length he succumbed to the spell of that beatific state when the mind becomes a blank, and the body seems to have a merely animal existence, and everything is seen and felt in “the apotheosis of stupidity.” It is a state approaching Nirvana, when a man sinks into the *Sleepy Hollow* of sublime indifference to the world, and abandons himself to Poppy Land and the Lotus Eaters.

There are many *Sleepy Hollows* in England. Every county has at least one or two, but in the West Country they abound. You may find them in Shropshire, in Herefordshire, in Worcestershire, in Gloucestershire, in Somerset—tiny villages of indescribable beauty and charm, that seem to have no part or lot in the world’s busy life, where the one straggling street, lined with old thatched cottages standing back from the road amid the colour and scent of their own gardens, cottages with black beams going criss-cross over their white faces, never seems to wake from slumber; where the grey church tower, ivy clad, broods in silence above the resting beds of the rude forefathers of the hamlet; where

Sleepy Hollow

the giant yew tree, cradled in a thousand storms, casts “a pleasing horror of shade” over the lych-gate that opens upon the green graves; where the buxom housewife bends over her vegetables, gathering materials for the stew-pot, and seems to be growing there herself; where the sweet fragrance of the hay new mown floats over the twisted and tangled hedges from the broad meadows; while at close of day the sleek cows are driven from the lush pastures into the byre, and you overhear presently the milk bubbling and foaming in the pail.

A *Sleepy Hollow* in Devon comes back to me as I sit and muse. A background of high hills fronts the sea, clad in trees and shrubs, with deep, winding coombes running up among them, through which tawny streams brawl and babble over smooth stones and glistening boulders. An old Rhenish tower stands at the foot of the quay; during the spring tides the spray dashes over it in clouds, and the waves rush tumultuously on to the roadway. An irregular line of ancient cottages stretches half-way up the hill above the tiny harbour, among which the Rising Sun stands conspicuous and does a roaring trade among the stout jack-tars. A coastguard with a brass telescope under his left arm patrols the harbour side, looking vastly important and benevolent; his presence imparts an air of security to the community, and when he opens his brass telescope and stares intently at nothing on the horizon, we get an impression of the silent vigil of the British Navy, and understand vaguely how it is that we have

Sleepy Hollow

become a great Empire. The village Reading Room, enshrining a unique mixture of indescribable perfumes, marks the centre of the street; beneath it is the Lifeboat House, with a large barometer let into the adjacent wall. Village wiseacres gaze intently at the barometer every morning, and prowling visitors ask asinine questions of a meteorological nature, which are answered with a profundity derived from incessant and intimate communion with the imprisoned mercury. The Reading Room contains a select library of diminutive proportions and extraordinary fustiness; the volumes are mostly sporting or marine in character, and spend their lives in undisturbed seclusion behind glass doors. Social events take place in the Reading Room—a concert sustained by local and visiting talent; a lecture by some peripatetic savant; a dramatic performance of portentous solemnity; a conjuring entertainment by a wandering professor of the black art; a dance organized on behalf of the young people, and incidentally of the Cottage Hospital. Across the brawling river the Manor House stands white and square in a green meadow, exhaling social exclusiveness and dignity; every day at one o'clock a bell rings from a small cupola for lunch, and the beach clears by magic. Ah me! Forty years ago this was *Sleepy Hollow* indeed—a Paradise, primitive, picturesque, perfect! Now it is becoming an abode of trippers. Channel steamers empty a daily freight of raucous humanity upon the peaceful shore; smart hotels flaunt their dubious attractions upon the erstwhile

Sleepy Hollow

quiet street; the place has succumbed to the seductive uses of adroit advertisement. The early glory has departed; only the old Foreland remains constant, and the silence of the everlasting hills.

This is a genuinely *Sleepy Hollow* where I write, which sufficiently accounts for the slumbrous character of the writing. It is impossible to sparkle here. The man who can scintillate in such an atmosphere, throwing off *jeux d'esprits* in conversation or coruscating in composition like a genial Guy Fawkes, must indeed belong to the hierarchy of genius, a being independent of space and time. Peace profound broods over the blue roofs and brown walls of these lowly dwellings. There are hours in the day when you may pass through silent and deserted streets as though in an abode of the dead. The shops have the same flyblown contents from year to year. You can buy the morning paper in the evening, if after a week's residence you retain a vestige of interest in worldly affairs or a rag of intelligence beneath your skull. I have endeavoured to create a momentary diversion in one emporium by purchasing an ounce of tobacco; it is but a ripple on the placid surface of local existence. The butcher finds it hard to make both ends meet. This is not intended for a pun; 'tis but prosaic fact. Strange fragments of sheep and oxen dangle from time to time in his window; at such periods he is on the verge of despair, having but Lenten entertainment to dispense. If you enter his domain, he will stare gloomily at his chopping-block, waving his knife

Sleepy Hollow

resignedly at his few crimson wares, as who should say: "This is the end of all things, my friends; take it or leave it, as you will." Or maybe he will regard your entrance as a kind of studied and gratuitous insult; and, sharpening his long, keen knife with terrific ardour, make a sudden and furious onslaught upon six inches of inoffensive mutton-bone, and transfix his counter with the point of his knife with the desperation of a frenzied and disappointed man. Then he will put up his shutters and close his door, and affix a dismal notice to the jamb intimating to all and sundry that business is suspended *sine die*.

Such is life in *Sleepy Hollow*.

THE BLUE BALL

THIS is the place. I see it sometimes as in a kind of waking dream. It comes up out of the misty visions of the past, and stands out clear and distinct as a picture hanging on the wall. It belongs to the long, long thoughts of happy and careless boyhood. It is the ideal wayside inn. Its creaking sign dangles in the wind over the ancient doorway—a large, cracked, dark blue sphere, like a cerulean cannon-ball, seamed and blistered and peeling, a weather-beaten veteran. It hangs at the end of a short rusty chain, and swings and grates and squeaks dismally in every passing breeze.

The Blue Ball stands on the verge of the rolling moor, and the purple heather grows almost up to the very threshold. The pungent reek of smouldering peat and the delicious scent of burning logs is for ever associated with the spot, hallowed in memory. The village contains barely a score of cottages, and the inhabitants number scarce half a hundred souls: stalwart farm-labourers, most of them ; a few buxom, apple-cheeked women ; a dozen or so barefooted, tawny-legged, brown-faced, 'tousy-haired, bright-eyed children ; one or two wrinkled, spectacled grannies, with white mutches and blue aprons, sitting in the sun at the open doorways, knitting or reading, gossiping or quietly dozing ; certain bent old

The Blue Ball

men with white and scanty locks, a plentiful lack of teeth, and weak rheumy eyes, clad in soiled smocks, and leaning heavily upon gnarled sticks as they shuffle down the road ; and, more rarely, a dark-eyed maid, with the complexion of a poppy, strong and straight and graceful in carriage, who makes the susceptible heart of man to bound at her approach.

Not an impossible idyllic community either, but frankly human. Mistress Renshaw, who lives at the tiny cottage with the green blinds, has a shrewish tongue ; and Mistress O'Hara, who dwells in the thatched house at the end of the village, has a standing quarrel with her next-door neighbour over a question of two yards of garden ground ; and Mistress Richards is as full-flavoured an old gossip as you would be likely to find in a day's march. As for Grandfather Drummond, he has a superb and inexhaustible supply of rotund, vigorous, rebellious, and scarifing language always available when his rheumatism is more than usually vicious, or when anyone inadvertently steps on his gouty toe. And there is the cottage where Molly Penrose, beautiful still, but with a look of tragedy haunting her dark eyes, moves quietly about her simple work, a whole history in her pale face. It is two years since handsome Jack Burnett, a ship's officer, lured her away to the great city. She was a girl when she went, she was a woman when she returned, and the world was never the same again.

It was at the Blue Ball that Pitchford, the poetical curate, once spent a memorable week. Pitchford

The Blue Ball

was very large, and the rooms of the Blue Ball were very small and very low; and he told me afterwards that he could lie in his bed and, stretching out his arms, touch the wall on either hand, and he brought home visible and tangible evidence of the low doorways in the shape of a lump the size of a hen's egg over his left eyebrow. Apropos of this experience, he related a preposterous anecdote of a man who lived in rooms with ceilings so low that he could only have soles for his dinner.

The event of the day at the Blue Ball is the passing of the coach. Towards the late afternoon a faint sound is heard in the distance—a thin, far-away note, long drawn out; it is the guard blowing the horn. Presently the sound is repeated much nearer; in a few minutes the coach dashes up to the inn, its six horses with panting nostrils and smoking flanks thankful for their brief rest and a liberal bucket of water, while the driver issues stentorian directions to guard, ostlers, and passengers alike, and there is as much bustle and excitement for the next ten minutes as if the *Aquitania* herself had just arrived at Southampton.

There is a tremendous hill down from the inn into the larger village in the valley, and before the descent can begin two vast drags are placed under the rear wheels; and when the driver has once more mounted to his seat after burying his face in the depths of a pewter pot of Devonshire cider, the coach rolls slowly down the steep, leaving two smooth, shining tracks where the drags have slid heavily through the

The Blue Ball

ruddy soil of the road. On the right of the road there is a sheer drop of three or four hundred feet to the sea-beach below, and the outside passengers look nervously over the edge, and whenever the coach gives an extra lurch the ladies cling to their neighbours with gasps and shrieks of perturbation and alarm.

Opposite the Blue Ball is a tiny stone church, whose squat tower stands sturdily defiant to the four winds. It is on a height above the sea, and often have I sat on a summer day in the overgrown grass of the graveyard listening to the dreamy murmur of the waves on the rocks below, and watched the white gulls hovering motionless on broad wing in mid-air, or making sudden swoops to the water, or skimming the waves in careless rapture, or wheeling solemnly about the cliffs uttering their strange, discordant cries.

On Sundays the tall thin Rector rides up the long hill to the church to conduct service in the afternoon. He is a kindly, gentle man, a little deaf, with dreamy, misty blue eyes, a sepulchrally hollow voice, and a smile of singular purity and sweetness. I heard him preach there one hot August afternoon, and I shall never forget the beautiful simplicity and solemnity of the brief service, the spectacle of the village congregation, and the tender tones of the Rector as he lifted his hands in the Benediction, his figure bathed in the ruddy rays of the declining sun as it streamed through one of the coloured windows in the west.

My richest memory, however, is of the Blue Ball itself, and of a much less spiritual character.

The Blue Ball

Christopherson and I had tramped over twenty miles that day, and no food had passed our lips since we had set out at nine in the morning. We had been through the Doone Valley, and it was nearing five in the afternoon when we landed at the inn, where we ordered an instant repast. Appetite is not the word to describe our condition. We were in a state of Siberian starvation. I must not dwell upon the gormandizing scene. It was gross, but glorious. And a Devonshire meal is satisfactory—oh, perfectly satisfactory! The early stars were beginning to peep when we had finished, and the final pipe put a touch of Oriental sensuousness to our feelings of gratitude and repletion.

A GALE IN JUNE

THEY say it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good ; and if this page does not come with the salt of the brine and the wuther of the gale about it, the fault is due to my sorely buffeted wits. One does not expect a storm in June ; but our climate is inexhaustible in its resources, and the first week-end of June in the year of grace 1913 was memorable for a strong south-wester that blew for the greater part of four days. I have good reason to remember it, for I specially chose a day in June for a flying visit to Oban, feeling sure that at such a season the elements would be on their best behaviour. But you never can tell. That imaginary and inscrutable old party, the Clerk of the Weather, seems to have his tongue in his cheek sometimes, and to take a malicious delight in overturning the plans and blasting the hopes of sanguine but hapless mortals.

I set forth on Saturday, June 7, and boarded the *Columba* at Gourock about half-past nine. The wind was then decidedly fresh. So were some of the passengers even at that early hour ; for it was a holiday with many, and they were elated at their happy escape from the drab and grimy city, and were taking advantage of the week-end to let off their animal spirits at Rothesay and Dunoon.

The boat was crowded ; parties of hilarious and

A Gale in June

somewhat brainless youths patrolled the deck arm in arm, singing uproarious ditties, making inane jokes, and indulging in heavy horse-play. Out in the Firth the breeze blew strongly, and the waves were distinctly choppy. Plumps of rain drove smartly over the decks and drummed against the windows of the saloon. The spray hissed over the bows in showers. It was cold and cheerless, and the sky became more leaden and sullen as the hours went by.

But nothing could eclipse the ardour or quench the spirits of this holiday-making multitude. They were out for the day, and were resolved to make the best of it. There is a Mark Tapley streak in our British blood, despite the gibe that we take our pleasures sadly ; the worse the conditions, the livelier grows the inner man.

At Dunoon nearly a third of the passengers disembarked ; at Rothesay the boat was well-nigh emptied. Rounding Ardlamont we met considerable waves ; for several minutes before reaching the quieter waters of Loch Fyne the *Columba* was bumped and slapped heavily by the big rollers. The surrounding hills were wrapped in cloud and mist ; much of the scenic charm of the voyage up till now was lost. The most sheltered part of the trip was going through the Crinan Canal. But as we neared Crinan the wind began rising with an extraordinary rush of sound ; the sea-board once more became visible, and we could see in the distance the gleam of the manes of the white horses as they raced with the wind. There was evidently a rough sea outside, and ominous

A Gale in June

remarks were passed among the passengers. The *Mountaineer* awaited us at Crinan pier, straining at her ropes, and, everyone being aboard, she started off without loss of time.

And now our woes began. The gale had by this time risen to a great height. I reckon myself the worst of sailors; in a storm I am usually prostrate and inconsolable and utterly oblivious to the world. At such dire moments it matters not what may happen; let the Fates wreak their vengeance. I was prepared for the worst when I caught sight of that raging sea outside, and commended myself to Heaven with quiet but desperate resignation. My one regret was that I had taken a most excellent lunch.

But to my extreme amazement I experienced not a single qualm. I think my immunity was due partly to growing excitement and partly to preoccupation. There was no time to think of internal symptoms when once we were in the open; the outward scene was so fascinating, and I could do nothing but gaze in wonder at the heaving water and the flying foam, clinging desperately all the while to an iron stanchion amidships to prevent myself from being flung against the bulwarks.

The wind was now blowing in tremendous gusts, and the vessel kept heeling over to an extraordinary angle; once or twice it seemed as if she must inevitably be blown right over. The curious thing was that the sun was now shining brilliantly; vast patches of blue sky could be seen; the clouds raced through the heavens, hounded by the wind, which

A Gale in June

shook the funnel, and rattled and strained the ropes, and sang in the rigging ; and it was singular to watch the rolling waves, a deep blue and green, and shining in the sun, seething with foam at their crests ; while the steamer pitched and rolled and dived like a living creature, and sometimes quivered from stem to stern from the blow of an unusually heavy wave. It was a tempest in sunshine.

It was too rough to call at more than one pier—Luing. At Easedale the waves were dashing up the sea-wall to a prodigious height ; where the coast was rocky there were clouds of spray mounting upwards from the shock of the pounding water, and white cataracts falling from the rocks as the waves receded. It was magnificent while the sun shone. But as we drew near Oban the sky became one cloud ; torrents of rain fell ; the wind was cold and cutting. I descended to the saloon for my bag. Ye gods ! what a sight ! Spick and span tourists they had been at Crinan, these now prostrate mortals ; here they were, two hours later, pale, green, perspiring, dishevelled, distraught, in various stages of collapse in deck chairs and ottomans, with tin receptacles placed conveniently for instant use ; and they *had* been used. One gentleman was in active eruption to the last, with a young man holding his hand in assurance of hope. I felt a sympathetic yearning towards him, for I knew that by all the rights of previous experience that poor soul should have been myself.

There is no town more beautiful for situation than Oban. It has a glorious bay ; there is an outlook

A Gale in June

towards the Isle of Mull that would make a poet even of a stockbroker. Sunsets are to be seen there of amazing and complicated splendour, leaving their tracks of green and gold on the edge of the night like some exquisite embroidery. Marvellous effects of sea and sky, of light upon the hills, of changing colour on land and water, are found there on summer days and summer nights. I have seen Oban on one of those mystical Highland days—to be seen nowhere else—when the little town seemed to be entangled in a web of coloured mist and dancing rainbows and thin draperies of flying cloud. But, alas! Oban was not herself on Sunday, June 8. Her streets were swept with wind and drowned with rain. No colour showed but grey; no outlook of enchantment. The cheeriest place was the warm fireside.

PADDINGTON

THE names of railway stations are generally names of places, but the names of the great London stations are something more—they are names of gateways. Some of them are like the “charmed magic casements” of the poet’s imagination; they open upon places where some of the happiest hours of our lives have been spent, the veritable fairylands of youth and joy. That is what fascinates me in these crowded and dingy termini, filled as they are with deafening noises and jostling multitudes. When I find myself on certain platforms I forget the hustling mob; I forgive the importunate traveller who digs his elbows into my ribs, clearing a pathway to his carriage; I skip nimbly out of the track of perspiring porters charging the shins of the unwary with piled barrows; I spend reckless coppers at the bookstall. Even the shriek of the engine is like the horns of elfland on my ear; the green flag of the guard waving in the rear is like a blessing upon the expedition.

These gateways affect me with various emotions. Victoria does not move me; Charing Cross does not make my heart beat more quickly; the Great Central leaves me without a tremor of excitement. I own to a thrill at King’s Cross and to distinct palpitations at Euston; I experience intense satisfaction when I stand beneath the imposing crystal span of

Paddington

St. Pancras ; but the station where I feel moved to dance and sing and behave like a lunatic at large is Paddington, for Paddington is the gateway of the West.

Was it not Andrew Lang who once referred to the initials R.L.S. as the best-beloved initials in literature ? Such a place do the initials G.W.R. fill in my estimates and memories of travel. And I am glad that among the reshuffling and reshaping of the railways in these latter days the Great Western Railway still retains its old title.

Paddington itself is not inspiring. It is a gloomy spot ; its approach through Praed Street is the reverse of exhilarating. But what matter ? I do not propose to pitch my tent at Paddington. I go to Paddington that I may get away from it. It is a gateway : the gateway of the West. I can almost see the heather blooming on its platforms and catch the sparkle of the Channel from its portals. To step into a train at Paddington means stepping into glorious Devon in a few hours. The purple of Exmoor, the tors of Dartmoor, the rushing of the Lyn at Watersmeet, the Ship Inn at Porlock, the Doone Valley, County Gate, the Blue Ball at Countisbury—all are there when Paddington opens its doors.

What wonderful advertisements, too, adorn the walls of Paddington. They induce a kind of ecstasy of day-dreams. Art, real Art, has now been enlisted in the service of the Iron Road. On the hoardings one may see pictures in gorgeous colours of mountain, moor, loch, and sea-coast which simply make one

Paddington

ache for the booking-office. Here is a picture of the Cornish Riviera, with the Atlantic rolling in upon the rocks at Land's End ; and there, drawn up along the platform, is the express for Penzance. On another poster is a representation of Dartmoor, with a sunset that sets the heather all aflame. Beside it is a picture of Clovelly, with its one steep street, a series of broad steps up the cliff, looking like Jacob's ladder shining with heavenly suggestion. Yonder is Exmoor—the very name is music—and I think of the little wild ponies scampering over the heath ; and the Minehead coach rolling along the red roads in a cloud of dust ; and of County Gate above the village of Oare, where Lorna Doone was married to "girt Jan Ridd" ; and of Malmesmead, where the hounds meet for the hunt ; and of Dunkery Beacon away on the misty skyline. Wonderful pictures all, turning the grimy walls of Paddington into a Royal Academy of beauty, and yet nothing to the colour of the memories they raise in my heart.

How my heart would throb with happy anticipation when as a schoolboy I stood on the Paddington platform waiting for the train to start for Devon ! School-books were closed ; tasks were left behind ; holidays were begun ; five weeks of North Devon were about to make a paradise of living as with the touch of a magic wand. The cab, weighed down with the family luggage, had disgorged us at the portals of Paddington ; boxes and portmanteaux were already being trundled to the train ; tickets were purchased — nay, passports to the Elysian fields !

Paddington

Already I felt the soft air of Devon upon my cheek, and heard the gallop of the coach-horses as they vanished into one of the hollows of the billowy moor. The gateway of the West was beginning to open !

At Bristol the gate was wide with welcome ; at Taunton I had to hold myself together lest I should burst with ecstasy ; at Minehead, where we left the train and climbed to the roof of the coach, I drank the very honey-dew of freedom. At Porlock, where we pulled up at the sign of the Ship, a tankard of golden cider was a sacrament of joy ; when the tortuous declivities of Porlock Hill were passed, and we were on the threshold of the moor, the scents of bog myrtle, peat, and heather met us face to face, and we were all young again together. A few miles more, and then through County Gate into Devon, then the road above Glenthorne, then Countisbury Hill, then Lynmouth ; the West took us to her generous bosom, and we slept every night for five weeks to the ceaseless lullaby of the rushing Lyn.

I suppose there is no doubt that places are made by their associations. They may be lovely in themselves, but their loveliness is increased a thousandfold by association. No sane person could be in love with Praed Street, but to me it is one of the golden streets ; it is the highway to Paddington. No man with an eye for the beautiful could be charmed with the bricks and mortar of Paddington, but to me it is a palace of enchantment ; it is the gateway of the West.

And gateways make a real difference to the journey.

Paddington

From this grey city of the North there is now a train that has a Penzance coach; you can take your seat in it, and in thirty-six hours, after tearing through half Scotland and all England, you can land on the shores of the Atlantic on the Cornish Riviera. So the time-table tells me; so the alluring advertisements assure me; and I believe them. Some day I may test my belief and step into the coach for Penzance. But it will not be the same beatific journey. It is not properly begun. The start is somehow inauspicious. The approach is from a wrong angle. No, I must stand at the appropriate portal; I must pass through the gateway baptized, set apart, consecrated to that end. I must take my taxi to dear, gloomy, old Paddington; thence on I shall travel the road thronged with the old familiar faces.

THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION

I AM not fond of allegory; it is a risky form of literature. Unless a writer is very expert and careful, a metaphor is apt to get out of hand, and to go in at the beginning of a paragraph as the parish pump and come out at the other end as a regiment of soldiers. But sometimes a phrase or a figure of speech in an allegory may be most suggestive and impressive. Such a one is the Valley of Humiliation.

I have frequently been through the Valley of Humiliation. It is a gloomy spot, full of grotesque shadows and melancholy associations. You will not find it on any ordnance survey map, but it is conspicuously marked upon the map of my own heart. Therefore I have some reason to write of it, and can do so with authority. I would never willingly travel to it unless I had a return ticket. It lies between the mountains of Ambition and Self-Esteem. I had better not pursue or elaborate the figure, or I shall be lost. I have, however, peculiar facilities for writing of the Valley of Humiliation to-day, as I have only just come out of it. It was, of course, a quite involuntary visit; it always is. One never goes there of set design; one stumbles blindfold there, or falls into it with a horrid crash from the treacherous crags of the aforesaid mountains, or is

The Valley of Humiliation

carried there without realizing the direction in which one is going. Confession is admitted to be good for the soul, and as my soul to-day is in sore need of a plaster of some sort, perhaps this confession may help to restore its depleted vitality.

Let me, then, reiterate the fact that I have just returned from the Valley of Humiliation. I found its scenery more depressing than ever. I am not a golfer, but I am foolish enough to try to play golf. There, the murder is out; the reader will guess at once what has happened. But he does not know yet the depth to which I descended in that valley. Let me enlighten him, so that he may take warning and be led in saner paths.

I went to the golf-course with my host, whose own play from my humble and worshipful point of view is a miracle. Arrived at the club-house, we fell in with two other men—one a Southerner, the other a Northerner; and a foursome was arranged in the most amiable and even casual fashion. The Northern man proved to be the amateur champion of a certain county, and to his sorrow and mine I was partnered with him. That was the beginning of my dismay. I ought to have known better and pleaded a splitting headache or a game leg, but I did neither; I walked into the Valley of Humiliation with open eyes. And yet I did not recognize the entrance. That is the very mischief of this valley. One can approach it from so many different angles, and its scenery is never the same.

In justice to myself—it is the one crumb of con-

The Valley of Humiliation

solation I have with which to feed my hungry self-respect—let me say that the golf-course was not an ideal one. It is not like the one I played on last year at Aboyne, which I take to be the one referred to by Shakespeare when he writes of “great Nature’s second course,” St. Andrews probably being the first. No; this course is comparatively new. It was sadly neglected during the war, and it has not recovered. It is a nine-hole course, its tees are a negligible quantity, it has an attenuated fairway, it has acres of “rough,” its greens are not like the greens of the Elysian fields. In short, it is a course only champions should play on when they can get nothing better.

The play began. My host and the man from the South played to the manner born. As for the champion, he could do no wrong, as far as I could see. Their drives sailed away into far distances with an ease and an accuracy which elicited my dumb admiration, while at the same time causing me acute internal discomfort. It was the accuracy that really alarmed me. The ball flew from the tee straight as an arrow, and landed within an easy approach shot of the green every time. The “rough” had no terrors for these leviathans. The Northern champion was a man of iron mould. Lithe as a panther, upright as a dart, he made no show at addressing the ball; he just looked at it with a nonchalant and casual eye, as much as to say: “My little white friend, you are going where I choose to put you”; then he swung his club, and away went

The Valley of Humiliation

the ball until it became a speck against the blue and indifferent heavens.

I really cannot dwell on my own performances, or upon my tumultuous emotions. I got an occasional drive of moderate decency, but for the most part I pulled and sliced and did everything that no self-respecting golfer ought to do. I lost several balls; I got into ditches and furrows and tussocks of long, thick grass, out of which no club ever invented was sufficient to effect a recovery; I hoisted my ball into several trees, in one of which apparently it decided to remain; I formed a quite involuntary affection for the "rough," which never left me. By the time I reached the green, the three other competitors were waiting in various stages of outwardly calm resignation for my belated appearance. I never found the Valley of Humiliation so menacing or gloomy. For one thing alone I was profoundly thankful: the course was without bunkers. It was sufficiently desperate in its nature and general configurations without such an additional handicap. Had there been bunkers, I should undoubtedly have been carried home on a shutter or a five-barred gate, and never lifted my diminished head again.

I will say this, however—the Northern champion was a gentleman. He never breathed a word of reproach; he never once offered to give me tips, or to tell me what I was doing wrong. It would have taken up too much time. Of course, I ought to have asked him; I ought to have recognized my privilege and opportunity as the partner of a champion, and

The Valley of Humiliation

entreathed him for counsel, but I dared not. I am not an aggressive person. Lack of cheek has been my snare in this bewildering world. When I fail I endure in silence. But I see now, when it is too late, what a chance I have lost. I shall never play with a champion again. At the end of the game I ventured to say, as he was looking for a lost ball: "Thanks very much for your partnership." He responded with some entirely conventional observation, such as "Don't mention it," or "That's all right," or something equally innocuous; but if he had felled me to the earth with his brassie I should not have been surprised, I should but have received my deserts. But, as I say, the champion was a gentleman, and I lift my hat to him. I am now considering whether I should not burn my clubs and relapse on croquet or skittles.

THE BISHOP'S BOOTS

HOLIDAY time is a good time to watch for the byplay of life, to keep an eye for the trivial, to see much in little, to find suggestion in the commonplace. The observant man, who garners the harvest of a quiet eye, often finds his thoughts set moving in odd channels, drawn away along queer tracks, when he is sitting watching his fellow-creatures on the loose.

A year or so ago my holiday was made doubly joyful by the proximity of a Bishop. He lodged just over the way from us, and we were able, as my younger son puts it, to "watch his natural habits." I have not an extensive acquaintance with Bishops, but I hold them in tremendous awe. I do not think I have ever shaken hands with a Bishop, save one; but I once very nearly killed one with a golf-ball. I perspire whenever I think of it. I was driving; the Bishop was coming up the fair-way from the next tee, and was about fifty yards away. I pulled my ball badly, and saw it whizz sharply past the Bishop's ear. I was too aghast and abashed to say anything; he did not even glance in my direction; but I realized that an inch more might have created a vacancy in that particular See, and my game instantly went to pieces.

What interested me in the Bishop who lodged across the road was that every morning he cleaned

The Bishop's Boots

his own boots. Now, there is nothing remarkable in an ordinary man cleaning his own boots ; if Tom or Dick or Harry had done it, I should have thought nothing of it ; but to see a Bishop doing it was really rather staggering. We had a rustic seat in our small front garden, where every morning I sat observing the Bishop over the hedge sitting on his rustic seat in *his* small front garden brushing away at his boots with quite diocesan vigour and intensity. He did it in good style, too ; there was nothing clumsy or amateurish about the process, and nothing perfunctory either. He had the blacking on the seat beside him, and a set of brushes that had obviously come out of a genuine back kitchen ; he lit his pipe, plunged one hand into a boot, and fell to putting a polish upon it with an almost spiritual ardour.

I beheld this process morning after morning with unceasing wonder. I became conscious of an increasing respect for Bishops. As already said, I had hitherto held them in awe ; now I began to feel a sense of kinship, a feeling of brotherhood, a human glow, such as I had never dreamed possible in connection with a Bishop. I am certain that Bishops do not clean their own boots when they are at home. I associate a Bishop with an ecclesiastical palace, and boot-cleaning seems out of the question. It is not to be reckoned among the episcopal duties. But this Bishop was out to grass, off the chain, away from convention, careless of Mrs. Grundy, and I judged that his boot-cleaning was a symbol of his emancipation.

The Bishop's Boots

He wore tweeds, a jacket, and vast plus fours; he toolled solemnly down the road on a bicycle; he played golf; he fished; he went on shooting expeditions; he smoked incessantly; he walked bareheaded up and down the village at eventide with his wife on one arm and his wife's sister on the other; he rent the air with stentorian laughter; and every morning he cleaned his own boots. It was splendid. He was still dignified—the habits of a lifetime cannot be thrown off in a moment—but his dignity was chastened, softened; it shone in the plebeian glory of Messrs. Day and Martin.

Being away from one's ordinary routine certainly does make a difference in one's habits. Under such circumstances one does all sorts of things that one is not used to doing. I recall some of my own modest exploits during the war. I discovered undreamed-of resources in my repertoire. It was a striking instance of necessity being the mother of invention. In the Y.M.C.A. hut where I spent eight months I found myself leading a life of such exceeding unconventionality that made even a Bishop cleaning his boots seem tame.

I swept out a hall big enough to hold a thousand men, and did it periodically as part of my job. I became an expert at whitewashing ceilings, though I am bound to admit that my personal appearance at the end of the process resembled that of an Arctic explorer emerging from a blizzard. I was requisitioned as house painter and decorator, and spent a delirious day adorning a vast acreage of hut with

The Bishop's Boots

green paint. I became a carpenter and joiner, and even on one occasion a plumber. I climbed ladders, and did a certain amount of involuntary tobogganing on a sloping roof which I was told off to mend. I washed innumerable dishes, fried eggs and bacon, made beds, built and lit fires in a French stove (a feat requiring both genius and patience), cleaned long passages with soap and water, opened vast packing cases of goods, assisted at rat hunts, presided at immense urns delivering oceans of tea and coffee, sat at the receipt of custom in the pay-box, bent my mind over the making up of the daily accounts, sold chocolate, buns, pipes, tobacco, cigarettes, soap, pencils, and other miscellaneous articles, managed a library and bookstall, was chairman at concerts and lectures, scene-shifter and dresser at dramatic entertainments, superintendent of the kitchen squad, caller-up in the early mornings, night watchman, sewer-on of buttons, mender of rent trousers, billiard-marker, referee at whist drives—oh, dozens of things! I really began to feel an Admirable Crichton.

Routine is all very well, but it is good for a man now and then to be thrown upon his own resources. Routine may easily become a tyranny, and when that climax arrives a man suddenly thrown out of his ordinary grooves is a lost soul. Besides, faculties unused tend to atrophy, and it would be a distinct calamity for a man to go to his grave unaware that he is capable of cleaning his own boots.

This is one of the disabilities of wealth, that it tends to cripple a man's resources, to blind him to

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his versatility, to limit his individuality, to fetter his genius. When you can ring a bell and call for Jeames or Jeanie to do your jobs for you, what chance is there for the real all-round evolution of faculties and powers? The rich man may be saved many vexations, but he dies with half his music in him. He is unaware of the hidden stops in the organ of his being.

All this speaks eloquently of the simplification of life. Modern life has become so infernally complicated that man is in some danger of being ground to pieces in the machinery of his own devising. We talk of labour-saving appliances. Appliances! As if we were not already crowded out, well-nigh suffocated with appliances. Civilization is just a welter of appliances, a Frankenstein monster which we have created, and which now threatens us with extinction. The best appliances a man has are his own fingers with intelligence behind them. When I am wearied with the thought of the complexities with which we have surrounded ourselves, aghast at the artificial wants we have so recklessly multiplied, I think of the Bishop and his boots, and begin to see a way of escape.

SPRING

“The spring comes slowly up this way.”

COLERIDGE : *Christabel*.

I. THE PESSIMIST.

Monday.—Spring has arrived. There is no doubt about it. The reason I know is that I have a horrid influenza cold, and all my best handkerchiefs are at the wash. Everything is at the wash. The cleaning epidemic has set in with unprecedented violence; the whole house is being attacked with brooms and dusters and vacuums. The sweep came at an unearthly hour this morning, trampling heavily all over the place, making rumbling noises in the chimney, singing out directions on the roof to his invisible familiar down below, leaving marks of his elephant’s twelves all over the floor. There is a smell of soot everywhere. It simply pervades the place. It assaults my nostrils like snuff, and makes me weep with anguish.

The stair-carpets are up. All the carpets are up. There is a persistent bastinado on the back green. Dust is flying in every direction. My influenza is growing worse. This morning it is impossible to sit down except on the stairs. All the chairs are out in the garden. The whole establishment looks as if it were for sale. I examine the items in the garden

Spring

absently, half expecting to see a label attached, intimating great reductions and incredible bargains to an eager public. I am summoned from my literary labours every quarter of an hour or so to carry a pair of steps from one room to another, to empty a pail of dirty water down the sink, to detach heavy pictures from the wall, to trundle an armchair into the porch, to lift a table, or roll up a carpet, or shake a mat, or put a dust-sheet over the couch. Nobody can attend to anything except cleaning. My wife has her head tied up in a thing like a dissipated turban, and declines to speak to me. My daughter, similarly attired, only more so, addresses impertinent remarks to me from the top of a high pair of steps. It is impossible to conduct a successful argument with a person on a high pair of steps. They both seem to resent my presence, and appear to think that I ought to get into a suit of overalls and attack the cobwebs. It is a difficult and ungrateful world.

Tuesday.—Things are not much better to-day ; a little worse if anything, myself included. Spring is still here ; rather more here than yesterday. I cannot write, save in jerky and disjointed sentences. I cannot flow.

There is a deuce of a mess in the passage and on the stairs. As everybody else is going about with brooms, pails, dusters, and a dirty face, it devolves upon me to go to the door to answer the bell. I have just returned from the back-door much ruffled in my feelings, my native dignity in a state of low visibility, after a violent collision with the grocer's

Spring

boy, who was leaning his laden basket against the door, and fell bodily into my arms when I opened it. I have just scraped a pound of fresh butter off my waistcoat, and sponged the yolk of an egg, not very fresh, from my left trouser-leg. It is most humiliating. I had not been at my work more than ten minutes before the back-door bell rang again, and I had to interview the butcher's boy and negotiate his disgusting wares. I dislike seeing meat before it is cooked. It looks so red and chilly, and is generally wrapped in a bit of bloody paper. I think of operations and the morgue and all sorts of unpleasant things, and lose my appetite for the rest of the day.

Wednesday.—I am thinking of sleeping out to-night. There is no comfort anywhere. All my ideas are taking holiday somewhere far from here. I am no use to my family; I might just as well be covered with a dust-sheet, like the couch. I am made to feel my own inferiority at every turn. It is the kind of experience that tends to breed a diseased egotism and an overweening self-consciousness. If it continues much longer I shall be writing a human document like *The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff*, and advancing cogent reasons for suicide.

To add to the accumulation of dismals, a man has just been to tune the piano. He has been pounding away at three notes for such an unconscionable time that I feel as if he had been hammering madness into my brain. My wife has made the preposterous suggestion that I should dust my books! Oh, the utter unreasonableness of women, even of good women!

Spring

Why, there are between two and three thousand books, and she expects me to take them out of their comfortable shelves by twos into the garden, there to bang them together like a pair of cymbals, wipe their tops with a duster, and return them to their places. It would take me at least a week. Besides, I object to banging books together in that way. I would not mind knocking a few heads that I wot of together if there were any reasonable prospect of improving their quality ; but books ? No, no. A book must be treated with the deference due to wisdom and experience. If dust accumulates upon it, let it be gently blown from the upper edges of the volume each time it is taken from the shelf, not rudely battered against its neighbour with brutal violence.

Thursday.—My patience is running out. There is an invasion this morning of beeswax and turpentine ; the floor of the passage is like a skating-rink. When I went out of my dismantled sanctum a few minutes ago my feet were swept from under me, and I performed some jazzlike gyrations with quite involuntary agility. My temper was not improved by my friend from over the way “dropping in,” as he calls it, and growing ecstatic over the crocuses and the birds and the budding trees and the longer days. “Such a delicious feeling in the air, you know !” I looked at him as Hindenburg must have looked when his “line” was broken. Atishoo ! Spring !

Spring

II. THE OPTIMIST.

There has been a bowl of hyacinths and another of daffodils on the table since January, and it has been a pleasure and a wonder to see them growing. The delicate green of the stems and the leaves is a delight to the eye ; and then the flower, bursting through its sheath and filling the air with delicious fragrance ; it has been like watching a domesticated miracle. The young leaves of the poplar trees at the foot of the garden are out, and the creeper, half-covering the house front, is showing tiny red shoots all over its interlacing twigs. It has been pleasant to see the lengthening days, and to hear the piping of the birds about the garden in the evening and in the early morning. The dark days of winter are past ; everything in this life-giving season speaks of youth and hope and joy.

I could not but halt a moment yesterday as I passed a neighbouring garden and saw the first primroses of the year. They took me back to the green woods of Caerleon in Monmouthshire, where the primroses used to spread a yellow carpet and the wild hyacinths made a blue mist for miles. They took me back to Bonchurch in the Isle of Wight, where was a copse in the hollow of the hills clothed with such profusion of primroses that it looked like cloth of gold. They took me to Grasmere in Lakeland, where I saw them starring the grassy banks in a poet's garden, while all around the cuckoo shouted from the distant wood and the air thrilled and throbbed

Spring

with the chorus of countless larks. They took me to Warwickshire, where the rooks made such an incessant babble in March and April, busy with their building all the day. Few sounds are pleasanter than the hoarse clamour of a rookery in spring. They took me, too — those blessed primroses — to the Landslip and Luccombe Chine, where the rabbits scampered in hundreds over the short green turf in the early hours of the morning, and the level blue of the Channel twinkled in the sunshine between the tangle of bushes and trees, and the Culver Cliffs rose white and sheer from the water.

Oh, it is a beautiful and wonderful time is spring ; and if my heart ever ceases to feel the thrill of it I shall know that my brief day is over, and that it is time to lie down to rest.

THE BREAKFAST MOOD

I DO not know what has come over me, unless it be that I am getting into my second childhood. In former years I used to find it hard to get up in the morning ; it took me several minutes to waken in a complete manner. I had to yawn and stretch and rub my eyes and look vacantly at the ceiling and the walls, while the bed creaked and groaned under my varied movements before I could really sit up and take notice. Fully a quarter of an hour would elapse before I could take an intelligent interest in my surroundings ; often ere this lethargic process was fully accomplished I would fall asleep again. This represented the middle years of my experience.

At an earlier stage still, in those seraphic days prior to the mystic age of seven, I could wake in the morning instantly and all over without any of these later and languid contortions, and could bound from my bed like a stone from a catapult, and with almost as much violence. The mysterious adventures of the night made no effort to detain me ; they were forgotten as soon as “ the sun came peeping in at morn.” Then came the period just hinted at when those same nocturnal adventures would lay insidious hands upon me, and make hypnotic passes over my languid brow, and glue up my reluctant eyes for another spell of slumber.

The Breakfast Mood

Now the experience of wakening seems to have travelled full circle; once more I can wake without any preliminary pantomime. I want to get up; I want to draw up the blinds; I want to plunge into cold water; I want to sing and dance and make uncouth noises; I could slide down the banisters like a boy. Good heavens! yes, it is that "Kruschen feeling," only I have not taken Kruschen; it must—yes, it must be the approach of second childhood. There is no doubt of it.

What is to be done about the matter? I really do not know; I cannot put back the clock. The worst of it is I am becoming a source of irritation to my family. They have not reached my stage of matutinal hilarity. They come downstairs in various stages of somnolence and solemnity, and the spectacle of an elderly person, old enough in their eyes to know better, behaving like Ariel or Puck, full of innocent gaiety and garrulous nonsense, is a shock to their sense of propriety.

It takes Priscilla a full hour to leave the night behind and get into her morning stride. How any person of sanity and balance can be talkative over bacon and eggs passes her comprehension. Of late Percy has been plunged into a state of gloom by the preponderance of politics over sport in the newspaper; if the harriers and football do not receive the fullest notice in their respective columns it is Percy's private opinion that the country is going to the dogs. Talking of dogs reminds me that even Chawles comes down to breakfast with a dishevelled and debauched

The Breakfast Mood

appearance, as if he had been out all night; and if he does not receive a bit of bacon from any member of the family after making a circuit of the table, he retires in dudgeon to the sofa and reclines there with huffiness visible in every hair of his tousy head. Even Scheherazade, who is as vital a spark as any reasonable man could wish for a wife, presides over the morning teapot with a distraught air quite foreign to her na'ure; she and Priscilla begin to show their real paces in the evening, just at the time when I am longing for bed.

In fact, I seem to be living at the wrong end—of the day, I mean. Breakfast is my favourite meal, and the morning seems to me a lively and intriguing time. This is undoubtedly the beginning of second childhood, and for that there is no cure. Is it not R.L.S. who says, "Give us to awake with smiles," and utters the buoyant desire, "Call us up with morning faces and with morning hearts"? I take it that a morning face is a face like that of the sun, bright, warm, eager, energetic; perhaps it does need a prayer to enable us to wake like that.

I had a cousin once who used to wake like that. He suffered under the delusion that he could sing. Certainly he would make outrageous noises in his bath; when he came into the bedroom, radiant and glowing from the friction of a rough towel, he would ask with an ingenuous countenance if I had not enjoyed his rendering of the *Hallelujah Chorus*. Not that he was given to religious fervour; he usually greeted the day indiscriminately with the *Te Deum*

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or a popular music-hall ditty entitled *Little Mascots* ; but he preferred something with volume and even violence.

I slept once in a house where tea was brought to my bedside on a dainty tray, covered with an equally dainty cloth, and borne by an even daintier maid ; the cloth had an ingenious motto worked upon it, a perversion of a familiar Scripture, “Many are called, but few get up.” I think I shall have to get this worked for Priscilla, that it may be hung like an illuminated text above her bed. (N.B.—For Christmas, if my pocket won’t run to silk stockings.) The motto so tickled my fancy that I was out of bed in a couple of ticks. It would have had little effect on my conscience had my conscience needed an arousal along that line ; but imagination is a wonderful thing.

I don’t think I could bring the breakfast mood to such a pitch of—I cannot call it perfection ; it is rather perversity—as the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table. That, by the way, is an admirable title, but no man has any business to be an autocrat at the breakfast table. The brilliance and variety, the coruscation and vivacity of O. W. Holmes’s Autocrat—and first thing in the morning, too—is beyond most mortals. I think his other title is more suggestive and appropriate, *The Poet at the Breakfast Table*, and I have often wondered why that book should have been inferior to *The Autocrat*. But it is no doubt easier to be an autocrat than a poet at the breakfast table, or anywhere else, because few persons

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are able to stand up to dictation and dogmatism and tyranny when they are only half awake. They have not had time to don their fighting kit ; so they merely listen to the roll of the autocratic thunder, and immerse themselves in porridge. But a poet at the breakfast table is in a different category. He is in tune with the dawn, and diffuses a more benign atmosphere.

My old friend Christopherson—bless his heart!—induces the breakfast mood by a series of complicated contortions every morning which would be the death of me. They are performed in a state of nature, and involve a series of evolutions which endanger the gas-brackets. He calls them Swedish exercises, or something ; but I care not whether they come from Sweden or from China or from Fiji. One morning when I was staying with him I was wakened by a sound of running feet outside my bedroom door. I thought the house was on fire, and someone was sprinting for the fire-brigade. I sprang out of bed, flung open the door, and there beheld Christopherson, without a stitch on his manly form, thudding his feet at the double, marking time in the passage, elbows up, head thrown back, chest thrust forward, making a noise like the sound of an invading army.

“Good Lord, man!” I cried, “what on earth’s wrong?”

Christopherson ceased his padding on the mat, smiled his cherubic smile, and observed between his panting breaths, “Fine exercise, old chap. Splendid

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for the wind. You should try it. Keep your fat down."

I resented this indelicate allusion to my increasing bulk, but one cannot be angry with Christopherson for long. And we were soon in the real breakfast mood together.

HAMMOCKS

SOME time ago I read in one of those diverting periodicals known as "Health" magazines a highly entertaining article on "How to take a Cold Bath." The very title was refreshing in this resplendent summer weather; as for the contents, they were a perfect baptism of stimulating thoughts.

The article was based on the gratuitous assumption that nine persons out of ten never take a cold bath, or indeed a bath of any kind, and that the remaining one has not the least idea how to take one. Having adopted this conciliatory tone towards his readers, the writer proceeded to describe the one and only true method of taking a cold bath, in that elementary style and with that beautiful simplicity of spirit which is characteristic of those who have returned to Nature.

One is aghast at one's ignorance as the subject is unfolded. You imagine that you know how to take a cold bath, but a perusal of such an article dispels your complacency. Your own method is so absurdly opposed to all hygienic principles. In all probability you have first of all filled the bath with cold water; then you have got into it; then you have soaped and splashed and generally soused yourself; then after a final plunge and wallow you have stepped out

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dripping and blowing like a porpoise, and have rubbed yourself into a pink glow and felt as if you could thereupon "make the pomp of emperors ridiculous."

This would seem to be the simple method which would suggest itself to an unsophisticated mind; but it is all wrong, as you will doubtless discover if you so far forget yourself as to return to Nature. I am not going to reveal the ineffable secret. If you wish to discover it you must spend twopence in sending for a particular back number of *The Natural Man*, edited by a son of Adam whose name has escaped me, but whose coat of arms is represented by two bananas rampant on emerald ground, flanked by two heaps of filberts and brazils, a lettuce below, the whole surmounted by a fig-leaf argent and the motto, *Never say die*. It is worth the money.

I don't know what made me think of this cold bath business, for I did not set out to write of any such profound scientific theme. But I have been lying in a hammock for two hours to-day in absolute repose and quiet, and the wandering fragrances of an adjacent pine-wood, the twittering of birds, the murmurous humming of bees, the lowing of distant cattle, have given a primitive complexion to my thoughts.

Were I a poet I think I could sing the hammock. Cowper sang the sofa, which is a much more prosaic object, and made even that uninspired piece of furniture to radiate a mild genius. But he did well to call his effort *The Task*. The sofa is such a squat,

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solid, dumpy, four-legged concern, and would seem to be the least likely article on the face of the earth to catch "the light that never was on land or sea." One has painful visions of shiny horsehair monstrosities of slithery propensities ranged along the wall, where tired man tries in vain to stretch his limbs in classic outline and to ease his weariness. A task, indeed! It is impossible to see the faintest element of the picturesque in a sofa. To complete its own discomfiture, it generally boasts one of the most hopeless futilities of human handiwork, an antimacassar. This fabric is either an endless entanglement of white crochet or a blazing pattern in Berlin wool that drapes itself on the protuberant expanse of a cushion at the sofa's head. A professional musician of my acquaintance once ventured to court repose on a sofa thus decorated, and was subsequently seen going down the street, blissfully unconscious, with the antimacassar hanging from the buttons on his coat-tails. Yet Cowper sang the sofa, though I strongly suspect that it was his lady's challenge that nerved his Muse rather than any intrinsic value in the subject.

But a hammock is in another category altogether. Here is no stuffed solidity on castors, antimacassared, high backed, with springs that give muffled twangs at every movement of one's person, but a light aerial couch fit for the gods, swung like a cradle of gossamer between two trees. In this pendant bed one lies enchanted, gently swayed by every passing breeze, listening to the going of the wind in

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the tree-tops, gazing upward through a myriad twinkling leaves to the blue beyond.

There is poetry in the very conception of a hammock. It yields with restful and obliging elasticity to the slightest pressure of one's body, and accommodates itself immediately to every variation of position. It feels like a live thing, and one abandons oneself in a delicious languor to its undulating motions. Were it not that a hammock is essentially an out-of-doors luxury, I should be inclined to swing one across my den at home and sleep in it o' nights. What an economy of space it would be! One could send the four-poster a-packing. What a goodly number of cronies one could furnish with a night's lodging if they would only enter into the spirit of the thing and be content to swing from wall to wall! No doubt it needs an apprenticeship to sleep securely in a hammock, but the secret once mastered, what a wholesome luxury is earned! And in the morning one could simply roll up one's bed, make a neat bundle of it, and stow it away in a cupboard.

But it is as an open-air cradle I fancy a hammock most. I love the neighbourhood of trees, and in a hammock one can overhear the rustling, mysterious whisperings of the forest. Lying on the earth you may doubtless feel yourself to be in literal touch with Nature; but wrapped in this aerial meditation you seem to realize her livingness as you swing with the swaying branches. That wind in the tree-tops is like the distant surging of the sea, and there can be no sweeter lullaby. Birds come and cock a round

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inquisitive eye at you if you lie quiet enough, or maybe a squirrel in a neighbouring tree will glance timidly down at this strange intruder. Between the overhanging boughs you watch the clouds floating slowly through the sky; now and then a solitary rook wings his way to the distant wood; the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle reach your ear from the nearer meadows; by-and-by your eyes will slowly close, and you will sink out of sight and hearing of the outward world into the placid dreamland of the hammocker.

But it is as well to see beforehand that your rope is stout and securely fastened. Otherwise you will come literally to earth again with a suddenness that hurts a dreamer's tenderest feelings, and the poetry of the hammock will end in the thunder of unusually solid and monosyllabic prose.

THE GLORY OF THE LATE DAYS

THE phrase is Stevenson's. It occurs in one of his beautiful prayers in the form of a thanksgiving: "We thank Thee for the glory of the late days, and the excellent face of the sun."

It is, indeed, a thing to awaken gratitude, especially in a treacherous climate like ours, where there is a prevailing greyness of sky, and the sea mist dims our windows, and the winter fog wraps us in its murky folds. The phrase has recurred to me several times during this wonderful autumn, when day after day the light has lain golden on the landscape and the leaves have been slowly yellowing on the trees. The summer has been a precarious joy; the rains descended and the floods came, threatening to quench the high spirits of the holiday-makers and to make the harvest a heap. But the law of compensation has not failed us; the "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" has been shot through and through with threads of gold. Often by the time October is half sped the winds have swept the trees bare, and we are left with naked boughs and black skeleton hedges for full six months; but November is hard upon us now, and the year is still crumbling in gorgeous splendour leaf by leaf.

The Glory of the Late Days

There is no season more exquisite than autumn when it advances slow and stately, when the fierce winds are held in leash, and the fog fiend has not materialized, and the keen frosts have not yet heralded the onset of winter.

There is a glory of spring, fresh, vivid, full of promise, when the earth wakes from her winter sleep, and one can almost hear the sap running in every grass-blade and every tender twig like the riotous blood of youth.

There is a glory of summer, fuller, richer, more exuberant and mature, when the year seems to settle down to steady business, and Nature puts on her singing robes like a prophetess of joy.

There is a glory of winter also, painted with a brush dipped in silver rather than gold, save when the artist sweeps his brush full of the deep crimson of ruddy sunsets and makes a furnace of the western sky.

But there is no glory quite equal to "the glory of the late days." Nature is a delicate bride in spring, a comely matron in summer, a ghostly presence in winter; in autumn she is a swarthy gipsy, and no beauty is to be compared with her. The mellow light of September, the golden mists of October, the deep glow of the corn, the red tints of the trees, the tawny richness of the bracken, the wonderful stillness of the landscape, the pungent smell of damp earth and fallen leaves—these combine to make autumn a time of mystery and wonder.

There is some quality in autumn that makes

The Glory of the Late Days

it singularly impressive. It is rich in poetic suggestion. The wealth of the harvest, the mellowing fruits in the orchard, the large round moon of the reaping time, the creeping mists of evening, the fluttering of russet leaves in the still air, the smouldering sunsets—a score of things contribute to the subtle and cumulative effect of the late days on the imagination. Autumn has a certain tragic splendour.

There is a spot in leafy Warwickshire that always comes before my mind like a living picture during “the late days.” It is called Guy’s Cliff—a great old house, grim and grey, built on the edge of a rock. At its base flows a winding stream that widens out into a mere, and then falls suddenly into a foaming weir beside an ancient mill. The house, I believe, was once a monastery, and the cells of the monks may still be seen. Tall stately trees stand around like sentinels. I saw it one day in late October when the trees were dripping with dank mist. The old grey house loomed huge and ghostly through the clammy vapours. Rain had fallen heavily; the swollen stream swept along by the mill race; the thunder of the weir was loud and menacing. The place had a haunted look. I shall never forget the eerie feeling that possessed me as I stood on a tiny wooden bridge above the whirling waters and watched the scene in the gathering gloom of evening.

A day in late September is also photographed upon my memory, a day on the coast of North

The Glory of the Late Days

Devon. The sea was a dead calm, a sea of glass. The wooded hills looked down upon us as we rowed out in the big boats to meet the up-channel steamer. The morning mists had not yet cleared. The village street, the tumbling river, the thatched cottages along the quay, the old Rhenish tower beside which the *Nautilus* lay moored for unlading, the craggy Summerhouse Hill in the background, the grey shadowy Foreland stretching seaward, all swam in a golden haze. How the dear old place tugged at our hearts that morning! For a dozen successive years we had spent our annual holiday there, but never did it cause us such a pang at leaving as on that early glass-calm morning in September.

The glory of the late days brings back yet another picture. I see my old school in Birmingham, erected by "our pious Founder, King Edward the Sixth." A dark, forbidding building, blackened with the city smoke and grime, pinnacled along its front where it looks down on the busy traffic of the street, with diamond-paned windows and frowning portico. The autumnal afternoons there are fast in my memory. We broke up at five, the whole school assembling for prayers in the Great Hall. The rays of the setting sun sent ruddy shafts through the panes, making crimson stains on the worn stone floor, causing mysterious shadows in the vaulted roof, deepening the rich dark brown of the carved oaken canopy beneath which the head-master sat. I see his grave, kindly face as I write, and hear the sonorous tones of his voice:

The Glory of the Late Days

“Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord ;
and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and
dangers of this night.” And as the last flames of the
sunset glowed upon the venerable walls, it seemed as
if the prayer were already answered.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

I WAS taking a walk in the country when, in a secluded nook, I came upon a solitary house. It stood upon a piece of rising ground surrounded by tall trees. The gateway was flanked by stone pillars, each surmounted by a large ball, also of stone, green, cracked, weather-worn. The gate itself was broken, and swung on rusty hinges. The gravel drive up to the front-door was thickly matted with moss and weeds. The surrounding garden, of considerable size, was growing wild ; the once close-shaven lawn was littered with dead leaves. Ragged crows' nests swung in the tree-tops empty and deserted. The house, whose white front glimmered pallid through the gathering dusk, was not large—more than a cottage, but less than a mansion. It must have been comfortable once ; now it bore a haunted look, emphasized, no doubt, by its general air of neglect and decay. The windows were blank and gloomy, staring dismally from the featureless walls. No friendly smoke curled from the blackened chimneys. The glass of a small conservatory was much cracked and broken ; some of it lay among red fragments of flower-pots strewn on the tangled lawn. The roof of an adjoining out-house had lost several tiles ; a tiny pond with a fountain in the middle was stagnant and weedy. I was reminded of Hood's lines :

The Empty House

“O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear ;
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted ;
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is haunted.”

As I gazed upon this scene of desolation a rising wind moaned round the house, stirring the trees fitfully and making the dead leaves flit with a dry patter down the path ; and buttoning my coat about me with an involuntary shiver, I turned away and passed on down the road.

But somehow the charm was gone from the day. The spectacle of that empty house was ever before me. Turn where I would, I still saw the ghostly walls, the uncurtained windows, the smokeless chimneys, the unkempt garden. That house had been tenanted once ; mayhap children had played beneath the tall trees in summer, and made the air musical with happy laughter ; doubtless the various rooms had witnessed scenes of family joy ; around the glowing hearth friends had met and sped the hours in talk and jest. Commonplace thoughts enough, but strangely moving. During the remainder of my walk the ghosts of memory kept me company.

I saw another house, empty to me for ever, because the one who was the living soul of it is gone beyond recall. It was she who made the place a home of refuge, peace, and quiet happiness ; it was she whose talk made a visit there a perennial delight ; it was she who always gave to me the warmest welcome.

The Empty House

She gave personality to the house, to the neighbourhood.

There are the quiet roads where she would walk into the little town to do her household shopping. There are the green hills where she loved to wander. There is the distant cathedral, dimly visible in the haze of the plain, whose venerable tower she would point out to her guests. There are the woods she revelled in when spring awoke the earth. Yonder is the abbey to which she took me one memorable day, and which has since been like a shrine to me where holy pilgrimages should be made. There is hardly a spot in the whole neighbourhood which is not associated with her presence and consecrated by it.

And what talks we had ! It is hard to think they are all over. She loved books, being specially devoted to biography. Many a happy hour have we spent discussing her beloved Browning, Carlyle, Tennyson, Wordsworth, and Rossetti, talking over remembered places, men, and things. She was deeply and unaffectedly religious—no, I take that back; it is too cold and distant; to me she *was* religion, the thing itself. She seldom spoke of it; the pious phrase was not ever on her lips; for the sanctimonious whine she had abhorrence; but the life which is life indeed grew in her like a flower; its radiance, colour, fragrance were everywhere. Is it possible she was over eighty years of age when she left us ? Yet in her spirit she was eternally young. She went away in the month she best loved, the

The Empty House

month of June. The last letter she wrote in this world was written to me; the letter and the pen with which she wrote it lie together in my drawer.

“Something too much of this.” But the empty house brought it all back.

Another memory awoke, still further back in the years, a recollection of boyhood. On the outskirts of a Midland city I was taken to a sale of furniture at a great mansion. I was left to play and wander in the grounds while those who had brought me went in to the sale.

It was a beautiful summer day; the windows and doors of the great house were open wide. I could hear the strident voice of the auctioneer as he cried and knocked the various lots; the chatter and laughter of the crowd floated out over the garden, where I wandered about the broad pathways and spreading lawns.

Suddenly as I turned a corner I came upon a thick hedge of yew that screened off the vegetable garden from the rest; from behind it I could hear the sound of voices and of bitter weeping. Going through an archway in the middle of the hedge, I found myself in a wide kitchen and fruit garden. On a rustic seat a young girl was sobbing as if her heart would break; standing over her a young man, much like her in features, was vainly trying to comfort her. They were brother and sister, and had lived in the great house all their lives. A change in fortune had broken up the home and brought about a sale; these two

The Empty House

were taking a last ramble round the haunts of their childhood before bidding them good-bye.

The loud voice of the auctioneer struck harshly on the ear in the stillness of the summer air; the sound had been too much for the young girl. I drew back when I saw them in such misery; a while later I saw them both, with the saddest faces imaginable, walking round the garden of their childhood hand in hand.

THE FEEL OF JUNE

“ Green little vaulter in the sunny grass,
Catching your heart up at the feel of June.”

JOHN KEATS and Leigh Hunt once indulged in a competition with each other as to which of the two could write a sonnet in the shortest space of time. Keats won as to time, but it would be hard to say which of the two sonnets is the better; both are extraordinarily good. It is significant of the cordial spirit and friendly rivalry of the two poets that each thought the other's production incomparably the better. The subject of the sonnets was “The Grasshopper and the Cricket”; the quotation above is the beginning of Leigh Hunt's sonnet, two lines of wonderful beauty and suggestion.

“The feel of June.” Every summer the phrase haunts me. Certain phrases, lines of poetry, sometimes of prose, seem to bite into the mind inevitably at certain seasons of the year. Along with Leigh Hunt's phrase the opening of Emerson's famous “Address to Divinity Students” comes back to me every mid of the year:

“In this resplendent summer it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds, and sweet with the breath of pine, the balm of Gilead, and the

The Feel of June

new hay. Night brings no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their almost spiritual rays. Man under them seems a young child, and his huge globe a toy. The cool night bathes the world as with a river, and prepares his eyes again for the crimson dawn. The mystery of Nature was never displayed more happily. The corn and the wine have been freely dealt to all creatures, and the never-broken silence with which the old bounty goes forward has not yielded yet one word of explanation."

Such sentences cast a spell upon the reader, and affect him with a kind of enchantment. It is like listening to beautiful music; better still, to the rippling of clear water over the smooth stones of a brook.

Each month in the year has its own peculiar character, its own special charm. Even winter with all its naked austerity and harsh accompaniments has its mystic message. I confess to a cordial dislike of January, November, December, and March; but for the remaining eight months I have nothing but admiration.

Yet I fancy it is town life that makes the other four so disagreeable. The chill pavements, the choking fogs, the smothering dust, the grime and mud of bespattering wheels, the pall of smoke, the knife-like winds that sweep around street corners, the dismal and distressing aspect of black tenements and endless rows of anæmic, flat-chested houses, all go to make the four months named a nightmare. In

The Feel of June

the country they assume their natural demeanour, and their acquaintance is tolerable. Indeed, I have known December and January days of wonderful beauty in country places. The deep red glow of smouldering sunsets and frosty sparkle of stars on still clear nights are compensations for any temporary discomfort. April and May are full of the witchery of spring. September and October are mysterious months, touched with the wizard hand of autumn. But in all the months of the year there is nothing quite comparable with "the feel of June." It is the month when one can hear the throbbing of Nature's heart.

June is the month of trees. The foliage is then at its richest and fullest. The broad leaves throw a grateful shade. Through them the sun shines with a wonderful green glimmer, translucent, cool, a grateful boon to tired eyes—a fairies' grot.

I remember the thick lush grass near the Lickey Hills, where I used to lie and dream, listening to the call of the cuckoo all day long. I remember the green paradise of the Landslip in the Isle of Wight like some dim cathedral of the woods. I remember the magnificent trees of Warwickshire; were they not part of the true forest of Arden, and was not the name of Rosalind carved deep on every bole? I remember the river days at Maidenhead, the waving woods of Taplow Court, the massed foliage of Cliveden. The river sparkled in the clear summer light. Down at the weir there was a delicious coolness; the water ran as if in panic terror, thundering

The Feel of June

in white foam to the quiet pool below. A kingfisher sometimes flashed like a blue sword from the osiers; the splash of a leaping trout broke the surface of the still backwater. It brought back that enchanting page of George Meredith, the testament of all lovers, where Richard meets with Lucy:

“Above green-flashing plunges of the weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks thick with weed and trailing bramble, and there also hung a daughter of the earth. Her face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim that left her lips and chin in the sun, and, sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. . . . This blooming young person was regaling on dewberries. They grew between the bank and the water. . . . The little skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue; from a dewy copse dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note; the kingfisher flashed emerald out of green osiers; a bow-winged heron travelled aloft, seeking solitude; a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth. . . . Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall’s thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting, a terrible attraction.”

So runs on the mystic page, setting forth the wonder of young pure passion as it never surely was set forth

The Feel of June

before, exquisitely beautiful. It is the very apotheosis of the feel of June.

How infinitely heartening and wholesome is this feeling for Nature! I can understand perfectly the men who worshipped the sun and the trees, and bowed themselves before the spirit of the mountain or the flood or the storm. The breath of the universe was in them, coming upon the mind like a mighty inspiration. It is your city man who has his doubts and his cynicisms, as he sits and discourses glibly from the seat of the scornful. But the man who lives near mother earth finds his simple theology in the nearest grass-blade; his faith descends upon him from the stars.

THE FORGE

I HAVE come to a conclusion, which I have long resisted as a mere copy-book maxim, that the most satisfying pleasures are the simplest and the easiest to come by. The pleasure which is deliberately courted and pursued is never without some alloy. It is really extraordinary what an amount of trouble we are willing to take in order to see a Lord Mayor's Show or a clown grinning through a hoop. I refuse to assume the hypocrite cloak and deny that I have ever enjoyed such puerilities; on the contrary, I have enjoyed them vastly, and would even go again. But I have often had far more real delight out of casual happenings than out of events long looked for and carefully planned.

A child will get more real pleasure out of some old rag which has been twisted and knotted into the semblance of a doll than out of any waxen effigy with gorgeous clothes and eyes that close with a click. The rag may have been rescued from the clothes-basket or even from the dust-bin, while the waxen wonder may have been purchased in Wylie Hill's or brought in triumph from Regent Street; yet there is no question where the affection belongs.

I have spent some of the happiest hours of my life with a box of paints and a few bits of cardboard; with these materials I have produced the most

The Forge

beautiful and elaborate scenery for the celebrated dramas of *Jack Harkaway* and *The Miller and his Men*. The preparation excelled the actual performance of the play as the glory of the sun excels that of the tallow candle.

I can recall absorbed and ecstatic hours spent in boyhood over the winter fire at school, in company with a bar of chocolate cream and a "Boys of England Novelette." The total cost of this enjoyment was fourpence; but its actual worth is not to be set down in arithmetical terms. I might enumerate a small boat, my first cricket bat, a set of foreign stamps, a box of birds' eggs, a case of butterflies and moths, some of which articles were swopped, and none of which was of more than a few shillings in value, but every one brought me the most exquisite pleasure far out of proportion to the monetary cost.

The things I have most enjoyed have not cost me even a penny piece. A sunrise seen while crossing the Solent, with the spires and towers of Portsmouth silhouetted against a sky of gold; a September morning on the coast of Devon, when the sea was like a pond and the mists were rising like a curtain from the hills; an autumnal afternoon in the Great Hall of my old school, when the red rays of the westering sun made splashes of crimson on the flagged floor; a primrose gathering in a copse near Bonchurch, with a view of the white Culver Cliffs rising abrupt from the blue floor of the English Channel; an eclipse of the moon; a midnight walk

The Forge

on the shores of Loch Eck; summer days in the Highlands; a panorama from the Malvern Hills; a visit to Tewkesbury Abbey—these, and things like these, will abide with me for ever. They have come like gifts from fairy hands, and seem sometimes to be such stuff as dreams are made of. There is no gold that can buy such things; they are without money and without price.

I took a walk the other day in the direction of the hills. It was a bright winter morning; the frost powdered the grass; icicles hung from the black twigs of tree and hedge; ice glazed the pools in the ditches; the road rang like iron beneath the feet. Overhead the sky bent cloudless; the distances were extraordinarily clear.

My companions were two small boys, who asked countless questions of bewildering inconsequence. We had not gone far before the exhilaration of the morning infected our blood; we ran and danced and shouted and sang and whistled. An old horse in a field came and hung his great shaggy head over the hedge as we passed, gazing at us in mild surprise and grave deprecation. Each of us had a stick, and found ridiculous delight in punching little round holes in the ice at the roadside. As we climbed the hill the view began to expand; we saw Ben Lomond heaving his huge shoulder into the sky; on it was a thick powdering of snow. And now a sound arrested our steps; we stopped to listen. Through the still air it came—clink! clink! clink! It was like music in our ears.

The Forge

“Come on,” we all cried in excited chorus; “it’s the smithy!”

And we fairly took to our heels, and ran panting up the Brae until we arrived glowing at the smithy door.

I have never been able to resist a forge. I could stand watching the fire flaring up and the bright sparks flying for hours. There is no sound more satisfying than the roar of the bellows and the ringing clang of the hammer on the anvil. It is an exciting moment when the smith plunges his big pincers into the hot fire and brings out the horseshoe dazzlingly incandescent, and begins to beat out the glowing metal till the sparks fly in showers.

He is a gentle and benignant giant, the smith. He smiles at the boys and bids them come inside the door and see the horse getting his hoofs pared for his new shoes. This process of paring the hoof is a mysterious one to them; they wonder whether the horse does not feel it sore, and can hardly understand that it is no more painful than getting their own nails cut. But to see the shoe placed all glowing red upon the shaven hoof, to see the thick pungent smoke rising from the rim, to smell the acrid fumes and hear the sizzling of the burning horny substance, like the sound of bacon frying in a pan—this is almost terrifying to the young novitiates.

“Why doesn’t the horse kick? How can the horse bear it? Why does the horse stand so quiet? Can the horse feel it? Does the horse like it?”

The questions fly as fast as the sparks, and I have

The Forge

to deliver an impromptu lecture on the wonderful art of Vulcan.

The shoe is not quite fitting yet; it is thrust back again into the fire. The bellows heave and blow, the flame leaps up, the fire glows fiercely, the whole interior of the smithy is lit with dusky red, the shadows seem to palpitate with life, now growing paler and now settling into blacker gloom. The figures of the brawny smith and his stalwart assistant look sinister and demon-like in the strange half-lights; the horse waiting patiently in the background looks gigantic and fearsome as the fantastic shadows play over him. The whole scene is Rembrandt come to life.

I can hardly drag the fascinated spectators away, though it is close on dinner-time and hunger gnaws the vitals; indeed, I am loth myself to turn and go. As we pass down the hill we look back and see one window of the forge lit up with lurid light; the sonorous music of the anvil follows us for fully half a mile. I shall go again some day. The forge feeds the imagination, and the smith is a man whom it is good to know.

STARKEY

AT this moment Starkey is asleep. He has been sleeping profoundly for more than three months. He has discreetly withdrawn himself from the tumult of the world, and is enjoying the security of his own dreams. Not for him is the strenuous life; he has solved the problem of Nirvana.

Sometimes I have been tempted to envy him. Think of his immunity from the toils and troubles that beset the path and distress the mind of man ! He knows nothing of theology or of Mrs. Grundy, two of the most prolific sources of friction and apprehension and misunderstanding under heaven. He is not tormented by his passions ; he is undisturbed by politics. He is free from all social obligations ; he has no domestic responsibilities. He performs no toilet, exercises no vote, pays no rent or taxes. His mind never suffers the invasion of a thought ; consequently, he is never consulted for an opinion or advice. The problem of what he shall eat, what he shall drink, and wherewithal he shall be clothed never occurs to him. I have never seen him eat anything at all ; he seems to "eat the air, promise-crammed." Yet he thrives and appears to be robust. He drinks a little water now and then, for he is strictly teetotal, and does not affect even ginger-beer or soda water. He wears absolutely nothing, not even a string of

Starkey

beads, yet he is the very embodiment of decency and propriety. When he walks abroad it is at a staid pedestrian pace and with a distinctly meditative air, pausing frequently in his perambulations and gazing pensively over the landscape. Excitement never ruffles his calm nature; the most ecstatic emotion that visits him merely causes him to stretch his sinewy neck and wave his head to and fro, while his eyes glitter like two beads. He shrinks from publicity. I have known him turn in quiet disdain from the most pleasing and jocund company to seek a place of shade.

But his slumbers! They are prodigious. Since the beginning of October he has lain in a state of coma; it will probably be April before he shows signs of arousal. To look at him you would suppose him dead; but a faint tremor of the left eyelid when he is touched indicates that the breath of life is still in him. I anticipate his awakening with some interest; indeed, with suppressed excitement. If I happen to be at his bedside at the thrilling moment, it will be like witnessing a resurrection.

Happy Starkey! to escape the driving rains, the biting winds, the keen frosts, the blinding snows of winter. In my weary moments I could find it in me to be envious of thine immovable placidity; in my pessimistic I could covet thy clostral and inviolable calm!

Starkey appeals vividly to the imagination. Here is vital consolation for those who produce no thought for themselves, that they may be provocative of

Starkey

thought in others. Starkey is not a native of our land. Whence he originally came I know not—Mauritius perhaps, or Madagascar; certain it is that he is a traveller and has been the silent companion of those that go down to the sea in ships. He has heard the wind sing in the rigging, the north-easter piping over sloping decks, the hissing of salt spray, the creaking of strained cordage, the rattle of the anchor chain, the shouts of sailors, the thunder of giant waves.

Were he a poet, what lines he could write! Were he an artist, what pictures he could paint! Perchance he has seen the feathery palm tree and the waving grasses of the tropics; a group of dusky natives gathered on a golden strand; an elephant crashing through the jungle; birds of gorgeous plumage; mysterious rivers that glide through vast solitudes; many creatures that to him were comrades, but to us are strange.

Starkey's life holds the secret of romance. He came over to our shores on board one of His Majesty's warships, but how he got there history does not record. Perhaps he was a present to one of our sturdy jack-tars on leaving some distant port, a gift from a friend. Thence he passed, perhaps in a moment of convivial intimacy, to Mr. Wilkin, and from him—kindly, homely soul!—he came into the hands of a child.

I recall the day of Starkey's arrival. A brilliant summer day it was, and I was enjoying a morning pipe with all the serene content of holiday, when

Starkey

shouts of ecstasy sounded down the road. The shouts were in tones I knew. Presently a flaxen-polled laddie came pounding sturdily up the hill with shining eyes and something held in his open hand. It was Starkey, though at that exciting moment he was nameless. It was proposed to give him a bath and test his powers of swimming. Instantly a rush was made to the ever-flowing spring of St. Duthac, and there Starkey gave an exhibition of side-stroke that charmed all beholders. Thereafter he indulged in sedate and interminable rambles up the ample lawn, taking stock of his surroundings. The ceremony of naming was performed with all due pomp and solemnity. *Peter Pan* being an idol of the family, it was natural that our thoughts should bend that way. "Slightly Soiled" would not have been inappropriate for him before his bath; "Smee" was already the sobriquet of the wickedest pup in the world; so "Starkey" was fixed upon as a name suitable for one who had travelled far in the realms of gold. And Starkey he remains.

If Starkey lives the average life of his compeers, he will certainly draw his five shillings a week from a paternal Government one of these days. I have seen one of his tribe, the days of whose years are said to cover four centuries. He was the Methuselah of his clan. He lay out on the green enclosure for the tortoises at the Zoo, colossal, immovable; he is there yet, I believe. As I looked at him I thought what a history he could write were he given a fountain pen. Why, he had lived in the days of

Starkey

Elizabeth, and is still alive; and four hundred surging, troubled years between!

Well, well! And to think that Starkey may live as long! It makes me almost afraid of him. I had a tortoise in my boyhood, and when he was put in the garden, our maid, who had never seen such a creature before, gathered up her skirts in alarm, and exclaimed, "Oh! will it fly at me?"

Fly at her! If you could only see Starkey walking across the grass! It is to gain an inkling of that beatific state when time shall be no more.

TREES

THERE was a storm of wind and rain last night, and the two ash trees in the garden suffered severely. They have been in full leaf until the second week in November, and the spectacle of their green dress has filled the mind with pleasant thoughts of summer. When the sun has struck upon their waving branches, the leaves have twinkled a bright emerald; I have almost been cheated into the belief that spring is at hand. But now the illusion is most palpable and complete. That roaring wind has strewn the lawn with leaves, and left the ash trees well-nigh stripped and bare. The boughs have been tossing in helpless tumult; the leaves have fled from them in clouds. The black branches are dripping with the heavy autumn rains, and the grass beneath is sodden with wet.

As I listen to the sudden gusts of wind that go tearing up the valley with a ripping sound, and to the artillery of the rain sharply peppering the windows, I can no longer delude myself with spring fancies and summer idylls; the dark days are come, and as I watch the tossing boughs, the flying leaves, the hurrying clouds, the driving rain, I think of shelterless moorland solitudes and of wild times at sea. The ash trees have done their best, but they cannot keep winter at bay. The white doors of the frozen North

Trees

are opening a chink, and even the sun is paler as he catches a glimpse of ice and snow.

There is something human and friendly about trees, and the two ash trees that stand in my garden are as neighbourly and friendly as any I have known. Had it not been for my entreaties they would have been cut to the ground when my house was built; but, being a just man, my prayers prevailed. "Woodman, spare that tree!" Who could resist the plea? Architects and gardeners are often rude iconoclasts, and care nothing for sentiment. The architect would away with everything that threatens to obscure the glory of his own handiwork, and would sacrifice any natural growth to the amenity of a gable or a portico. The gardener has superstitions about a grass plot which cause him to breathe out threatenings and slaughter against anything that overshadows it. Nothing would give him more satisfaction than to see the axe laid at the root of the tree, and to superintend its conversion into logs.

I dislike that trait of character in man which leads him to arm himself with implements of destruction and to lay about him with the reckless abandon of a giant. That vindictive spirit which lurks in us all, bidding us rise up and say to our brother, "Let us go out and kill something," represents a primitive and barbaric instinct, and should not be encouraged. It is an instinct very strong in schoolboys, whose arms are in effect a tomahawk rampant, flanked by scalps upon a crimson ground, cutlasses crossed above, blunderbusses ditto beneath, and the Jolly Roger

Trees

flying over all. This savage period, in which the Red Indian is combined with the South Sea Islander, with a strain of Zulu and a dash of hooligan, is, I believe, a necessary and inevitable part of the process of our natural evolution; but it should not be unduly prolonged. It is probably never wholly obliterated in this life, but its progress should be arrested if possible at an early stage, and its insistence overcome by a course of study nicely calculated to counteract its insidious growth. Even in so lofty and disciplined a spirit as Mr. Gladstone this destructive characteristic persisted until late in life, and his predilection for felling trees does not endear him to us. It would have been better to work off his superfluous energy in flogging a golf-ball or punching a bladder.

Trees are poems, and no man should be permitted to cut and hack at a poem without express permission from its author. Nay, trees are themselves poets, and to fell them is to murder beauty. My ash trees are such excellent friends that I consult them on all sorts of secret affairs. They are glorious pagans, and with their mystic aid I keep alive my childhood's faith in fairies, goblins, gnomes, sprites, pixies, elves, and all that troop of strange beings that peopled my imagination forty years ago.

Under the ash tree Ygdrasil the gods hold their court. It is the tree of life and knowledge, of grief and fate, of time and space; it is the tree of the universe. Its branches spread over the world and its top aspires to heaven's remotest height. It

Trees

is fed by all the dews; its roots are nourished from secret fountains; it is kept green for ever. An eagle sits on its highest bough; a squirrel runs up and down its bark; stags wander in its shade. I cannot afford to lose all this poetry.

Ygdrasil is not, indeed, in my garden, but my two ash trees belong to its family; and when I look at them I feel as though I were looking out of

*“Magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.”*

At any rate, they conduct me into places quite remote from the garish glare of civilization, and I find myself wandering in quiet glades made musical with running water and singing birds, where the sunlight filters down through a transparent roof of living green, and the ground is soft with moss and starred with flowers. Presently the sun goes down, and the woodland grows mysterious with shade; then amid the stillness the moon sails up into a clear sky, its pale gleams fall through the whispering leaves, a bright star peeps down between the friendly trees. One sees and hears things in that mystic hour which are revealed to babes, but are hidden from the prudent and the wise.

Sometimes, when I think nobody is looking, I lay my ear to the trunk of the ash tree and listen; I fancy I hear the sap mounting within like blood in a human body. Just now its blood seems to be running thin and faint; it has no message to tell me, save that its life is ebbing, as though stricken with

Trees

mortal sickness. But in three or four months I shall listen again, and I know I shall hear the sap rising in a riot of joy, and the ash will whisper to me the glad tidings that "the winter is over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds is come."

TULLICH

“TULLICH!” The name is not musical; but to me it is magical, for it brings back the thrill of my first glimpse of the Highlands of Scotland.

Describe it? Wait; “season your admiration for a while!” Some things cannot be described; they can only be hinted at.

How many years ago is it? Nay, let me not begin to reckon. It may be ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred. It does not matter; for the whole thing is as vivid as a dream of yesternight.

My Southern eyes had hitherto seen nothing in the way of mountains but that huddle of hills tucked away in the corner of England known as the Lake District. I would not belittle that district for worlds. It is beautiful; it is full of literary associations; the spirits of Wordsworth, the Coleridges, De Quincey, Arnold, Chistopher North, Harriet Martineau, haunt the fells. The mountains are high enough to entangle the clouds; the quiet lakes are broad and clear enough to reflect the stars. I have spent some of the happiest hours of my life there; but it is a district, a corner, a neighbourhood, and the trail of the tourist is over it all. Now I was to see a whole land of mountain, moor, and flood on a scale of grandeur and magnificence that “made Ossa like a wart.”

I was grilling in the Isle of Man—in Douglas, of

Tullich

all places—amid steaming, glistening, flaunting, raucous crowds of holiday-makers, when a telegram fell as it were at my feet like a bolt from the blue; nay, rather like a messenger from the Elysian fields. It was from friends in Scotland, bidding me come for a week to the Highlands.

The Highlands! I had never seen them, but the very name made my heart knock loudly at my ribs. How I had often longed to go! Here was my chance. It was as though some Ariel had bidden me take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea!

I gazed around upon Douglas, thronged with trippers. Electric cars hummed along the crescent of the promenade; bands of music blared at every corner; shouts of costers rent the air; touts for lodgings and trips and entertainments bawled along the hot pavements; laughter and jesting met me at every turn. With the telegram in my hand, I had a momentary vision of a solitary loch and a heathery moor with the curlews crying over it.

My resolution was taken on the instant. I despatched a reply: “Coming!” I remember nothing of the voyage from Douglas to Fleetwood, nothing of the journey from Fleetwood to Glasgow; but from the moment I set foot on the Highland train life was a dream.

I was to alight at a place called Daviot. I had never heard of Daviot; whether it was fifty miles or two hundred I knew not. It was in the Highlands; that was enough. When I saw Daviot I thought

Tullich

with a gulp of nausea of Douglas, with much the same feelings as a man newly arrived in Paradise might cherish of the Inferno.

What a contrast! I had left pandemonium; I had attained peace. A drive of six or seven miles from Daviot Station took me through country wherein the gods walked daily. I was in the land of the Bens. Brawling rivers of a rich tawny colour ran down their rocky beds. Heather still glowed on the shoulders of the hills. Wide moors spread out into enchanting distances. Coveys of grouse whirred and rocketed through the air. Peewees cried and circled in the clear blue of the sky. The silence healed me; the solitude was sweet and grateful as a caress; and the air! Ah, I knew there was something new and strange and wonderful. He who has never drunk of Highland air knows nothing of nectar, ambrosia, the elixir of life, the tonic of inspiration. I cannot write of it; it is among the things that cannot be uttered.

And here is Tullich! A stone-built cottage at the head of a steep winding road, sheltered by a batch of stunted trees all bent one way by the prevailing wind, stretching their arms out distractedly to the North. Is that all? No; but I told you at the beginning I could not describe it. Tullich is not the house; Tullich is the view, the air, the situation, the companionship. That road down there in the distance goes to Foyers. That mirror lying gleaming a hundred feet below is Loch Ruthven. There we fished, boated, basked, talked, sang, whistled. There

Tullich

on the sedgy margin I watched a heron fishing for his supper. Yonder hill on the other side of Loch Ruthven is Black Rock ; a golden eagle has been known to make its nest among its grey crags. Think of that, ye perspiring promenaders of Douglas !

But come with me ; the best is yet to be revealed. Along this path ; it ends on the open moor ; a few yards farther, and there, hidden among the hills, lying dark, deep, silent, solitary, at the foot of a steep precipice, the top of which is table-land, is Loch Choire. It is enchanted ground. On a sunny day I have seen the Naiads bathing from its sandy shore. The lake is nearly circular, a cauldron in the hills. We had a boat upon it, and spent golden hours pulling idly to and fro, or drifting lazily in the hot sunshine.

I never spent such a holiday ; never one that did me more physical good, nor one that brought me such physical rest and renovation. There was nothing to trouble one ; the most exciting incident of the day was the arrival of the post. Walking, cycling, fishing, rowing, climbing, lounging, basking by day ; books, whist, chat at night ; early to bed, early to rise—this was our programme.

We were fifteen miles from Inverness ; thither we made several excursions on our bicycles. Inverness never loses its charm. It lures me as no other town in Scotland. Since the time of Tullich, the Royal at Inverness has opened its hospitable arms to me more than once—most welcome, most comfortable, most interesting of hostellries. There is a bedroom

Tullich

immediately under the slates, looking out on to the head of a gigantic stone Highlander in the Station Square, where Christopherson and I have slumbered peacefully after a ride of seventy miles. It sounds nothing to relate, and it is not of the slightest consequence to a living soul; but it represents a red-letter day in my diary, and I should be an ingrate not to record it.

A CHILD'S THOUGHTS

“ It is very nice to think
The world is full of meat and drink,
With little children saying grace
In every Christian kind of place.”

So wrote that perpetual child, R.L.S., and in so saying the thoughts of many childish hearts stand revealed. It is undeniable that the world of the average healthy boy and girl is largely a world of meat and drink. Their thoughts are gloriously gastronomical. The approach of dinner-time is a blessed season, anticipated with longing, and dwelt upon with fondness, especially on great occasions such as birthdays, when the happy youth is permitted by a doting parent to choose his own dinner ; or Christmas, when we all become children, and recklessly throw down the gauntlet to the demon indigestion and bid him do his worst.

Is there in all literature a more mouth-watering description than that of the preparation of the Christmas dinner in Bob Cratchit's humble home in *A Christmas Carol*? Dickens was great at such scenes. The picture of the two young Cratchits brings up many a similar scene of festivity to our minds. Did we not once do as they did ?

“ Two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had

A Child's Thoughts

smelt the goose, and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table. . . .”

Later on, “the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped.”

Later still, “the youngest Cratchits in particular were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows.” And when it was suggested that somebody might have got over the wall of the back-yard, and stolen the plum-pudding, while they were merry with the goose, the two young Cratchits became livid at the supposition. To think of a world in which such scenes are indefinitely repeated kindles an unspeakable relish in the youthful imagination; it is to enjoy a sort of stomachic apotheosis.

There are few sights more delightful and inspiring than to see children tucking into their meals. It is such real business. There is nothing delicate or finicking about the process. It is all gross and palpable; it satisfies the primitive instincts; it is a stark and unblushing illustration of the physical basis of life. A schoolboy would appreciate that celebrated placard posted in the window of an American restaurant: ‘ Meal, 25 cents; Square Meal, 50 cents; Gorge, 75 cents.’ He would muster 75 cents or perish in the attempt.

In after-years we affect to smile at these youthful indiscretions, but it is nevertheless with a distinct

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feeling of regret that we look back to that halcyon time when we could eat dough-nuts with impunity, and ice-creams were better than rubies, and a bottle of ginger-beer was a pearl of great price.

It is remarkable how frequently this pre-eminently carnal appetite in children is allied with a perfectly unconscious poetry and a most engaging fancy. A young man of my acquaintance, *ætat.* five, has a quite extraordinary range of picturesque vocabulary and quaint conceit. One day he watched the uncorking of a bottle of lime juice, and on hearing the preliminary "glug, glug, glug" of the contents as they were poured into a tumbler, he exclaimed in a kind of bibulous rapture, "Oh, hark at the bottle smacking its lips!" On another occasion a fried sole was brought to table. The boy gazed at the brown surface of the fish in some wonder, and turning to his mother, who is an oracle on all profound themes, he inquired, "Are there any more fishes *with crumbs on them* in the sea?"

Is there not a sweet touch of poetry in this thought, quietly uttered one day at dinner-time after a prolonged study of his mother's face, "Mother would have roses on her face when she was married"? So she had, you blessed little poet, so she had!

He has quite a *Midsummer Night's Dream* turn to his thoughts sometimes, as, for instance, when he said slowly one day, "I think I should like to sleep under the flowers with the fairies, because then I could smell the flowers through the night." He regaled us all one morning with a vivid description of

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a dream he had the night before, all about "a wee chicken that growed up all by itself, *and nobody ever laid it!*"

We had an instance the other day of that reckless disregard of people's feelings of which Stevenson gives so graphic an illustration. "Once (he writes in the essay on *Child's Play*), when I was groaning aloud with physical pain, a young gentleman came into the room and nonchalantly inquired if I had seen his bow and arrow. He made no account of my groans, which he accepted, as he had to accept so much else, as a piece of the inexplicable conduct of his elders; and like a wise young gentleman, he would waste no wonder on the subject." The instance I refer to was on this wise:

Brother and sister were together; sister in bed with a cold, and indulging in long, long thoughts; brother on his back on the counterpane with his legs elevated towards the ceiling, and a purple complexion displayed against the sheet, bearing testimony to his gymnastic exertions. Sister remarks to her mother sitting by, "When I grow up I'm going to stay and take care of you." Brother remarks, still with his legs in the air, "Och, you silly; mother 'll be dead long before then!" This view was expressed with the utmost confidence and cheerfulness, thrown out with an accent of impatience and contempt, as of one who regarded the case irrevocably settled.

The talk one day revolved about the subject of legacies; the children seemed greatly taken with the notion of having things left to them. It opened up

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quite a pleasing prospect, and the loss of a parent was deemed amply compensated by the gift of a watch or a walking-stick.

“ Well,” said I to Master Five-Year-Old, “ what would you like me to leave you when I die?” He was plunged in serious reflection for a moment. Presently a bright idea struck him, and lifting a beaming countenance, he said, “ Will you leave me your trousers, dad?” And then, as a necessary afterthought, “ And your brazes” (braces). It was a modest enough ambition, and as things go with me at present that will be about all I shall have to leave behind.

HOW WE DIDN'T SEE THE KING

THE Royal train was due to run through our village at 9.30 a.m. At least, the papers said so, and Auntie regards everything the papers say as conclusive. So we all sallied forth after a hasty breakfast, Auntie still munching the remains of a scone in her dread of missing the great event. Auntie is intensely patriotic. She was half-way down the road while the rest of us were struggling with the last mouthfuls.

Of course, we had scanned the papers for days beforehand to see what date the King was going to travel. We were all quite excited about it. We are a loyal family, and have not yet reached that abyss of imbecility which waves red flags and shouts, "Down with all that's up, and up with all that's down!" We still believe in pageantry and processions, and Auntie would walk a mile with bunions or dried peas in her dainty shoes in order to see an ancient castle or catch a fleeting glimpse of the scion of a noble line. Even Chawles felt that there was something afoot that morning, and wagged his tail with patriotic violence when we asked him if he would like to see the King.

So we set out for the trysting-place, a gate beside the railway line overlooking the golf-course. Here we sat on a stone wall; in this elevated position we were sure we should be able to see right into the Royal

How we didn't see the King

compartment. Priscilla was certain of it. She had put on her best jumper for the occasion, a garment more notable for what it displayed than for what it concealed; but it was very modern and fashionable and chic, and that is everything in these days.

Meanwhile Felix had been to the station to get the morning papers; he now arrived at the grand-stand with the melancholy tidings that the Royal train would not pass till 10.10 a.m. Auntie's belief in newspaper veracity and authority came toppling to the earth. The Callow Youth, who with his bosom friend was busily engaged on the other side of the line in an exhibition of putting the weight, declared that he wasn't going to hang about for three-quarters of an hour just to see a Royal train, and threatened to go home. The rest of us would not hear of such a disaffection in the ranks of the Loyalists. Whereupon the Callow Youth and his bosom friend found a perch on the top of a five-barred gate and pelted us with small stones.

It must be admitted, however, that our loyalty suffered a strain. For the morning was cloudy and rain was impending. A snell wind was blowing, and Priscilla's jumper was particularly airy. A quarter of an hour passed, and our spirits perceptibly wilted and drooped.

Then a diversion occurred. A motor lorry halted in the road with two men in the driving seat. They also were determined to see the King. Priscilla and her mother hailed their advent almost with cheers, for the wind was chill, and (as I said before)

How we didn't see the King

Priscilla's jumper was breezy, and the radiator of the motor van was warm. Leaning against the radiator, the chilly members of the party toasted themselves, until by the time the Royal train arrived they were smelling strongly of petrol and saved their patriotism from perishing of cold.

There were several false alarms before anything really happened. Just as we were in the middle of a warm discussion as to whether the King would be in a tile hat or a Glengarry bonnet, Auntie raised a sudden shriek of "Here they come!" There was a rush from the radiator to the stone wall, and we all got out our hankies to wave—all, that is, except the Callow Youth, who was still busy putting the weight, and whose handkerchief in any case did not admit of any public display. But Auntie had been premature. Her desires and expectations had run in advance of the facts. What did arrive at the moment was another motor, and a black cow complacently chewing her cud as if such exciting things as Royalty had no existence. The aged parent gently chided Auntie, and perpetuated a villainous joke, declaring that she was becoming completely Balmoralized.

Presently a man appeared slowly marching along the line. He had a red banner in his hand, rolled round a stick, and advanced steadily in the direction from which His Majesty was expected. He was not officially clothed, and had a distinctly unwashed appearance, but his presence had an exhilarating effect on the party. We thought at first he was going to raise the Royal Standard or unfurl the

How we didn't see the King

Union Jack, and our spirits suffered a severe set-back when we discovered that his display of bunting was merely a danger signal.

Ten o'clock struck from the tower of the distant church. The mercury of patriotic fervour rose steadily within us. Five minutes past ten! Priscilla was balanced like a tight-rope dancer on the summit of the wall, and Auntie was clinging desperately to the coping-stone. They were very determined to see the King.

Ten minutes past! A clang sounded a few yards up the line. "The signal's down!" Auntie's voice in a shrill falsetto proclaimed the stimulating news. A faint whistle beyond the bend; then a puff of white smoke among the trees; a simultaneous cry of "Here it comes!" the two motor men leaned out of the van; Chawles was gathered into Auntie's arms to get a good view of his Sovereign; Priscilla, poised now like Pavlova upon a gate-post, nearly lost her balance in her agitation; her mother, with her eyes shining like two stars, was already fluttering a morsel of cambric about the size of a postage stamp; then two snorting engines rounded the curve, followed by ten beautifully washed and shining coaches, and in five seconds all was over. The King was on his way to Balmoral.

The feelings of the party suffered an acute relapse, and the subsequent accounts of what each had seen were various and disappointing. It gave one a shocking estimate of the value of first-hand evidence. Priscilla had seen several shadowy figures in one saloon quite

How we didn't see the King

distinctly, but whether King George V. was one of them is a question still "wropt in mystery." Her mother was positive she had seen a man in one compartment, but hazarded that it might have been the cook who had prepared the Royal breakfast. The Callow Youth was too busy putting the weight to see anything at all ; he was perfectly blasé about the whole business, and made several quite uncalled-for remarks about wasting our time in so foolish a fashion. The aged parent asserted positively that he had obtained an uninterrupted view of the engine-driver and the guard. What we had all seen without a shadow of doubt was a vase of flowers in the middle coach of the train, and we unanimously agreed that if His Majesty the King was not in that particular coach he ought to have been.

As for Auntie, alas ! no human being will ever know what she saw, except stars ; for as soon as the Royal train had passed she stepped back from the wall and fell into the ditch bordering the road, broke her spectacles, gashed her eyebrow, bruised her nose, and was led home in a state nigh unto nervous prostration brought on by shock. It was a sad ending to our little expedition. The aged parent made the sapient suggestion of wiring to Balmoral to apprise the King of the catastrophe, under the vague impression that something in the nature of damages might be achieved through the Keeper of the Privy Purse ; but the idea, though sympathetic, was vetoed, on the ground that the news might spoil the beginning of His Majesty's Highland home-coming. To

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the joy of everybody, however, Auntie made a speedy recovery under the influence of the many specifics prescribed by the several members of the family, and although for the next twenty-four hours or so she had the marks of her recent woes upon her, she went home firmly resolved to describe to all her friends how she didn't see the King.

IMPROPTU

I ONCE heard a well-known musician give an improvisation upon the organ. He sat down to the key-board with a dreamy expression upon his face, and after a moment's silence his hands began to wander idly over the keys, and for a quarter of an hour he entranced me with his music. There was thought in it, and feeling; there was colour and there was movement. I seemed to see a succession of lovely pictures; at one point he rose to a kind of ecstasy, as if the better part of him was rapt upon some mount of transfiguration, translating itself into melody. When he had ended, he sat quite still for a moment or two, and all his listeners sat still too; it was only when the musician rose from his seat that applause broke out. The spell was over, and we returned from dreamland to the solid prose of a singularly drab and ugly church, and realized that the seats were exceedingly hard.

I began to speculate about improvisation. What was it? Was it a spontaneous creation? Did the player spin it out of his own vitals? When he sounded his first note, did he know where he was going? Had he a goal in view, something seen in that moment of silence when he first sat down at the key-board, or was he literally wandering, letting his fancy take him whither it would? Here and there

Impromptu

in his playing I fancied I could detect something reminiscent, a suggestion of old tunes, a fragment of something heard before. Had he caught up some old recollection, and was he weaving it into new combinations of sound? The whole thing was profoundly original—at any rate, it seemed so to me, but I began to suspect that an improvisation was not, and never could be, a new creation. No man, not even a genius, can make something out of nothing; he can only work upon existing material. What he can do is to give it the personal touch; he simply adds himself to the material, no more; but that gives it a fresh life, distinctive with the impress of a vital personality.

It was that suggestion of reminiscence in the music that prompted this line of reflection. After all, the mind is not a clean slate. The mind is full of ideas, of memories, of experiences, of associations, of old times; these are the foundation of all thought. I began to think of the matter in relation to speech. A man is sometimes in the desperate position of being called upon to make an impromptu speech. He has no time for reflection, no time to make notes, no time even to jot down a random thought upon his shirt-cuff; he must get to his feet and do the best he can with the situation. I have now and then heard men make capital impromptu speeches. I have envied them their readiness, their sang-froid, their self-possession; for a man cannot make a good impromptu speech without great self-control, and an instant command of all his resources. The thing

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always seems to me to have a touch of miracle about it.

But, again, the mind is not a blank. The mind may certainly become a blank through sheer timidity and nervousness; I know that from bitter and ignominious experience. At the touch of a hand on the shoulder and a whispered request that I will say "a few words," my heart has been as water, and my thoughts have taken wing to Limbo. I could easily say "a few words"; that is a proposition that presents no difficulties and no terrors. It is the presentation of a few consecutive ideas that makes me yearn for the floor to open, and to swallow my confusion and bury me from sight. But what is an impromptu speech? Some people confuse it with an extempore speech. But there is no resemblance between the two. An extempore speech is a prepared speech; it has been thought out carefully beforehand. Perhaps it has been written verbatim, and the speaker has reduced what he has written to a few notes, a few brief headings and catch-words, for purposes of delivery. He has a definite theme, a definite purpose, a predestined end or goal in view; he knows exactly where he is going and what he wants to do; it is only the language which is forged at the moment of utterance. An impromptu speech is a speech in which there has been no time for preparation. Nothing has been thought of beforehand. All that the speaker can do is to catch a suggestion or two from previous speakers, if there have been any, and to get what inspiration he can from the character of

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the occasion. Given a certain amount of self-control, however; given a modicum of native intelligence and mother wit, there is no reason for panic, no reason why he should subside in utter failure and humiliation; for, like the improvising musician, he has much experience behind him. All kinds of thoughts and recollections are at his disposal, and granted that he does not lose his head, he can make something out of his material. Impromptu speech is largely reminiscent, and experience will pull the speaker through.

The greatest speaker I have ever heard was Joseph Parker, the famous preacher of the London City Temple. His preaching was a spiritual wonder. It had all the appearance of an improvisation, all the effect of an impromptu utterance; but the hearer realized that such thoughts as he presented could not have been forged on the spur of the moment; they were meditated in secret. His line of thought was carefully sketched out beforehand; only the language was left to the occasion. He used to say that often, when he stood up before his great audience in the City Temple, he did not know what his first sentence would be, that he did not know a single word that he was going to utter; but he knew every thought that he wished to establish, he knew exactly the goal at which he wished to arrive. It was an intuitional kind of preaching, and the suggestiveness of it was extraordinary. Parker used to live at Hampstead, and he would take long walks alone on Hampstead Heath. In these solitary walks he would meditate

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his sermons ; his study was in the open air. Then he would return home and jot down a few brief pencil headings on half a sheet of ordinary notepaper, and his sermon was ready for delivery. I have in my possession one of these precious half-sheets ; my father, when he was once preaching in the City Temple, found it between the leaves of the pulpit Bible, and brought it away with him. The whole thing contains barely thirty or forty words, and no one who was not in the secret of Parker's peculiar mode of thought could make anything of it ; but with that half-sheet before him the great preacher would hold a congregation with the spell of his genius, and make even Holborn Viaduct seem like a suburb of heaven.

THE ROYAL AQUARIUM

IN the days of long ago, the Royal Aquarium stood within full view of Westminster Abbey, though I doubt if it derived any sanctity from that situation. Indeed, there were excellent people who deemed the Royal Aquarium a place of dubious resort. A very different building now stands upon its site—namely, the headquarters of the Wesleyans in London. The grim old prison of Millbank on the Thames Embankment has now been replaced by the Tate Gallery, and it is a notable process of exchange; but not more so than the substitution of a Wesleyan church for the Royal Aquarium. There were plenty of folk, however, who went to the Aquarium for perfectly innocent amusement, and among these was a favourite uncle of mine, who treated me every Christmas to a seat in the stalls.

Although this unique place of entertainment was called an aquarium, it was by no means solely devoted to fishes. There were, indeed, a few rather dismal-looking tanks ranged along certain walls, where some queer creatures disported themselves in watery gloom; but the actual aquarium was merely a side show. In fact, the Royal Aquarium was full of side shows, where, for an extra fee of sixpence, you could see the fat lady, the living skeleton, the dwarf, the Siamese twins, or some equally attractive mon-

The Royal Aquarium

strosity. I never saw any of these, but I remember being greatly entranced with the performing fleas. This was one of the permanent side shows. Skeletons and fat ladies might come and go, but the fleas were a fixture. They gave their performance upon a long counter, at which the fascinated spectator stood, and, if he wished, gazed at them through a magnifying-glass. But they were quite visible to the naked eye. The chief triumph of the fleas was to draw all kinds of microscopic vehicles along the counter. I vividly remember a tiny hansom cab with a flea in the shafts, a flea driving in the dickey, and a couple of amorous fleas inside as fares. The pace of the equipage was not killing; the progress was stately and even funereal, taking from ten minutes to a quarter of an hour to travel from one end of the counter to the other. I do not think there would ever be any prosecution for exceeding the speed limit. There was a state coach, too, a miracle of gilt, which took part in a kind of Lord Mayor's show, drawn by six fat fleas, and driven by an elderly coachman flea, with two flunkey fleas standing up behind, and a flea Alderman reposing on the cushions within. I used to wonder how these creatures were fed and trained. It was certainly a very curious and unique exhibition.

But the main performances of the Royal Aquarium took place under the arch of the great glass roof, and were of a miscellaneous and diverting character. Two performers especially entranced me. One was Zazel, the other was Ethardo. Zazel was a lady of physical grace and intrepid soul, who did astounding

The Royal Aquarium

things on a high wire. I used to watch her with dilated eyes, gliding to and fro on the quivering length of wire, balancing herself with a Japanese sunshade, and doing tricks that thrilled my schoolboy spirit with unspeakable satisfaction. Having ended her high-wire gymnastics, Zazel was then shot out of a cannon with a terrific report, landing upon her back in a vast net stretched from one balcony to another. It was amazing to see this woman stepping briskly up to the cannon's mouth, lowering herself into it by instalments; then, when she had disappeared within, her manager cried with a loud voice, "Are you ready?" and a faint response came from the recesses of the cannon, very high-pitched in tone, "Ye-e-es!" And then the cannon went off with a deafening bang, and this singular projectile was seen a moment in mid-air performing a graceful parabola into the net, and Zazel would be seen running and smiling along the net, blowing kisses right and left to her admirers. But her most breathless feat was a dive from the roof of the building head first into the net, a distance of nearly a hundred feet. Zazel would climb up a series of rope ladders with the agility of a monkey, and swing herself on to a small platform close under the glittering glass. There she would stand a moment and flutter a wisp of handkerchief to the crowd below, who were all dislocating their necks with anxiety and eagerness; then, amid gasps of astonishment and occasional howls of dismay from excited females, she would launch herself into space, and the spring of the net

The Royal Aquarium

shot her several feet up into the air when she landed. Oh, a thrilling business, I do assure you, and one that so aroused the spirit of emulation in my breast that I used to practise high diving off the end of the sofa in our dining-room at home, endangering my neck and playing havoc with the sofa springs.

Ethardo was a thriller also. He was a performer on a vast white globe, upon which he stood, propelling it with his feet. The climax of his performance was the propulsion of his globe up a spiral which reached nearly to the roof. This spiral was made of board about six inches wide, and Ethardo's white ball bulged over it like a huge map of the world. As he went up the spiral, getting higher and higher, every eye was fastened on him, and a sigh of relief was raised whenever he paused for a rest. But Ethardo was a rogue and a humorist, and at one point of his perilous ascent he would always stop when he was fairly high up, and he would take out his handkerchief to wipe his dripping brow; then he would look down, his face became a mask of horror, his knees trembled and knocked together, and a scream of terror would come from some hysterical woman in the audience; and then Ethardo, having elicited this testimonial to his prowess, and having indulged his little pantomime of terror long enough to make everybody feel a moment of extreme discomfort, would suddenly smile and straighten his knees and wave a triumphant handkerchief, as much as to say, "It's only my fun!" and pursue his globular way till he reached the top.

The Royal Aquarium

And then, having rested a few moments, he would come down backwards! My uncle, hardened ruffian that he was, would grin at my fears for Ethardo's safety, but to me the globe-walker was a hero.

It was the Royal Aquarium, also, that provided the Benzougzoug Troupe of Arabs, who went through a most amazing show of tumbling, wrestling, and balancing; a Japanese Troupe, which did weird things with pyramids of boxes and ended by climbing a ladder of swords with their bare feet; Holtom and his feats of strength, who had a cannon fired at him and caught the ball in his hands—something tricky in this, I fancy; and a sword-swallower, who took six swords into his interior, with the six hilts sticking out of his mouth one above another; who swallowed a walking-stick borrowed from the audience as if it were a stick of asparagus; and who swallowed a watch, also borrowed from the audience, and let down his capacious throat by its chain, and you were invited to mount the stage and lay your ear against the swallower's chest and hear the watch ticking in his inside. I never tried these feats, as I distrusted my powers of assimilation, and there were no swords in our house. I might, indeed, have tried the walking-stick, but somehow the idea did not appeal to me. So I limited my imitations to Zazel.

THE SMOKERS' SEAT

IF a man smokes at all he should be allowed to smoke anywhere. He should not be hampered and made ill at ease by restrictions. He should not be driven to inhale the fragrant weed in some den of his own. I dislike those houses where you have to walk delicately, like Agag, and to assume the rôle of a thoroughly unnatural and uncomfortable man when you enter the drawing-room or the best parlour. Such houses irritate me like those provocative inscriptions you see in parks, "Keep off the grass." These public commandments arouse all the degeneracy I have in me. The only time I ever want to spit is when a notice in a railway carriage tells me not to. Public notices never seem to credit you with the instincts of a gentleman.

These trite reflections have been awakened by a recollection. A letter from my old theological college in London arrived this morning, and I fell to musing over bygone days. My thoughts went to the Smokers' Seat. The college having a distinctly religious flavour, we students were supposed not to smoke on the premises, though why tobacco, a plant obviously devised by a beneficent Providence, should be deemed incompatible with the sincerest piety I have never been able to understand. Anyhow, there was a standing order in the college that no one was per-

The Smokers' Seat

mitted to smoke on the premises. Being a direct prohibition, this was a direct provocation. As a prohibition it was a failure. Prohibition can never be anything other than a failure, because it is a purely negative policy. The result of this collegiate commandment was that those of us who smoked at all invariably smoked on the premises. The authorities were frankly defied. They deserved to be, since they understood student human nature so ill.

The prohibition had, further, the disagreeable effect which prohibition always has—it bred all manner of secrecy and subterfuge. Every species of ingenuity was provoked by which the law could be avoided and authority set at naught. Sentinels were placed in corridors while men enjoyed their pipes or cigars. Some students smoked up their chimneys or out of their windows. Many ate strong peppermints or cachous, or fumigated themselves with counteracting perfumes. One or two bold and jesuitical spirits betook themselves to the roof of the institution, and when discovered and remonstrated with on their rebellious conduct, they justified, or at least attempted to justify, their infamous proceedings by blandly assuring the Principal that they were not smoking *on* the premises, but *over* or *above* the premises. This ingenious but fallacious explanation was not accepted.

There was in the college grounds, however, a retreat for the refractory. This was a seat at some distance from the college building, reached by a

The Smokers' Seat

winding path, and securely screened from all beholders by a thick clump of laurel bushes. It commanded an extensive view across Regent's Park, and on still days the muffled roar of the lions in the distant Zoo could be heard. The prospect was diversified with games of all sorts, according to season—cricket, football, tennis, hockey, quoits, bowls; while at certain hours of the day, usually on the approach of dusk, the prospect was further rendered agreeable (at all seasons) by the strolling of clinging lovers.

Hither came the smoking cronies, weather permitting, for a “crack” on things in general or for the discussion of some knotty problem of the soul or theology in particular. What profound themes have been overhauled in that shadowy shrubbery! What oracular views have been expressed on things which angels desire to look into! What secrets have been shared, what shy confessions made, what amazing views exchanged! The solitude of the spot was conducive to spiritual expansion. The Smokers' Seat was the repository of talk that revealed a man's real self; it was the clearing-house of personality. Here men unburdened their souls. There was plenty of fun and laughter and chaff and nonsense, but there was a constant slipping in among the deeper things too.

Students are like that. They are shy creatures—shy, I mean, of letting their real selves be known. Self-revelation can take place only in congenial company and in propitious moments. Here was the

The Smokers' Seat

trysting-place of many heretics. I think most heretics are smokers. No man can become a heretic without courageous independence, nor can any man become a heretic without meditation, and smoking is a vindication of independence and provocative of meditation. A love of tobacco provides a point of contact, and ensures the human touch without which all talk is so much conventionality and politeness. Moreover, there is apt to be a superior and supercilious air about the non-smoker, and when he pursues that line, the imp of mischief is let loose in the smoker's breast.

To this retreat came Christopherson, came Ruthven, came Tottenham, all three burning to solve the riddle of the universe. Christopherson had the legal mind, and was quick to detect a fallacy. Ruthven was a devotee of Martineau and Stopford Brooke, and regarded orthodoxy as a kind of disease. Tottenham was just at that enchanting age when riddles of philosophy and theology and metaphysics alike are settled with a wave of the hand, and he would sit wriggling with ill-concealed impatience as he listened to these profound discussions. To them came I, more willing to hear than to contribute, for at that time I was shy of committing myself and was rather ashamed of my own lack of experience. I can see Christopherson now, ticking off his points on his fingers as he wound his way through some weighty argument. I can hear Ruthven, in his slow hoarse drawl, pulling the argument to pieces between the puffs of his pipe. I can feel the seat beginning

The Smokers' Seat

to heave and shake as Tottenham grew more and more impatient, and at last burst out with, "But look here, you silly old asses; it's like *this*, you know!" and he would proceed to unfold a point of view so extremely young and novel that we were all dissolved in mirth, and the discussion ended in inextinguishable laughter.

But those talks on the Smokers' Seat did not all end in smoke.

CELEBRITY

WHEN I was quite a small boy, I was taken one Christmas to Hengler's Circus in Birmingham to see W. F. Wallet, the famous clown. Wallet was not a clown in the popular sense of the word, with a red nose and painted cheeks and grotesque garments, doing things with red-hot poker and strings of sausages. He was one of the last of the old jesters, a clown in Shakespeare's sense, of the type of Touchstone, full of verbal quips and witticisms; indeed, he described himself on the programme as "The Queen's Jester." He was quite an old man when I saw him, well over seventy years of age; it was his last appearance as a public performer, and he died not long afterwards. I recall nothing of his witticisms—at that time I should have been much more impressed by a clown who made faces and stood on his head—but I remember that when we were leaving the building after the performance, old Wallet was standing at the entrance, clothed in Christian garb, and my aunt, who was with us, expressed a wish to shake hands with him. My father gallantly effected an introduction, and the old jester, fixing my aunt with a quizzical eye, observed, "Do you regard me, madam, as a celebrity or a notoriety?"

I had never given the matter a single thought, but I now began to perceive that to be celebrated and to

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be notorious were two very different things. Probably the most remarkable collection of the two types together is to be found in Madame Tussaud's Wax-works. Most of her notoriety's are in that harrowing department known as the Chamber of Horrors. I have lingered there with morbid curiosity, and mused over the horrid fascination of these singular people. The assembly is a waxen representation of notoriety of the worst and most sinister kind.

It is an easy matter to become a notoriety. A preacher, for example, who put up an umbrella in the pulpit, or threw a hymn-book at his chief seat-holder, or tore the pulpit Bible in two in a moment of ecstasy, would have his name trumpeted all over the land; his portrait would be in all the pictorial journals, and a hundred newspapers would report the eccentricity. He would be a nine days' wonder. All you have to do in order to become a notoriety is something singular, grotesque, violent, bizarre—to walk down the street in a green hat, a yellow coat, and crimson continuations; to take a header into the basin of the fountains in Trafalgar Square; to scalp your grandmother in the Strand; to advocate earnestly a diet of whelks and Bath buns and ginger-beer as a cure for dyspepsia. But celebrity is another story.

It is wonderful what some folk will do in order to get into the limelight. They will go to any trouble to attract attention. Publicity and applause are the breath of their nostrils. I noticed in the papers the other day the announcement of the death of that

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strange creature who called himself Sequah. I remember him coming to Birmingham forty years ago. Going to school one day I met an immense crowd. A procession of gorgeous caravans was moving slowly down the street. Men in violently-coloured liveries were driving the horses. A brass band was blaring strident tunes from an open char-a-banc. This was Sequah arriving in all his glory. He professed to cure any disease under the sun. A preparation known as Sequah's Prairie Flower would rejuvenate you in a few weeks. Such things as rheumatism, indigestion, baldness, and catarrh were to be no more. But the item on Sequah's programme that excited my schoolboy brain was the painless extraction of teeth, though the cynical and unbelieving did say that during this performance the brass band blared its loudest in order to drown the frantic cries of the victims. However that may be, half Birmingham went to have refractory molars removed; bottles of Prairie Flower sold by the thousand; and Sequah, clad, I believe, as an Indian in skins and war-paint and a wondrous head-dress of feathers, reaped a tremendous harvest. It was a remarkable exhibition of notoriety.

Celebrity must be a fine thing for those who like it, but for those who dislike publicity it must be extremely trying. I have always sympathized with the celebrated Mycroft Holmes, elder brother of the great Sherlock. Mycroft was much the greater man of the two, but he hated fuss and bustle and publicity, and was generally to be found in solitude after

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business hours at the Diogenes Club, where he would solve the knottiest problems without moving from his arm-chair. Sherlock, on the other hand, must be nosing about like a hound on the trail, interviewing all sorts of queer people, putting himself into all sorts of singular disguises, flying about the country in search of clues, lying on his stomach in uncomfortable positions with a lens to his eagle eye, raking up a thimble of tobacco-ash from a tuft of grass, or seeing incredible possibilities in a bit of thread or a half-obliterated footprint. Sherlock got all the kudos and the limelight; but Mycroft, the greater brain, was content with the Diogenes Club.

A man who gets to the top of any profession is a person of immense interest. I have always been an unabashed hero-worshipper. I have gone through all manner of inconveniences in order to hear Joseph Parker preach, to see Henry Irving act, to see W. G. Grace play cricket, to see John Roberts make a big break at billiards. And I would do it still if those stalwarts were still here. But, alas! they are vanished from our eyes, and I am growing an older man. I fear Stevenson is right when he says that we must be on the sunny side of thirty when we go out to hear the chimes at midnight or run a mile to see a fire.

Moreover, celebrities are all very well at a distance, but they are mostly disappointing persons to meet. One forms such prodigious notions of one's heroes, that when one meets them in private life one somehow expects them to be more than human, and is

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disenchanted to find them subject to the same bodily limitations and necessities and ills as oneself. The great orator will surely pour forth coruscations of wit and wisdom, and all he says is "How do you do?" and "Pass the salt, please." It is better to see them afar off amid the glamour of the work they can so amazingly perform. Then the great actor dominates the stage, and makes the rest of the *dramatis personæ* seem like dwarfs. Then the great cricketer piles up runs, and though the fieldsmen are moved hither and thither by an astute but almost despairing captain, the batsman continually places the ball exactly where the man is not. Then the great billiard-player gets the balls together in accordance with his own desires, and proceeds to glance off into pockets with an accuracy and rapidity that strike one dumb. Yes, let the glamour remain. Let me see my heroes in their own native element. When they are out of it I know they will have feet of clay. I prefer to see them when they fly on the wings of their inspiration, not when they walk home and ask for a drink.

A TRAMP'S LIFE

I MET a man in the train a few weeks ago who was vastly entertaining. He was a big fellow, full of self-importance and self-confidence and complacency, and he spoke with all the assurance and finality of an oracle. Had anybody in the compartment ventured to contradict him, I don't know what would have happened ; he looked quite capable of throwing us all out of the window.

It is curious how conversations get started in a railway carriage. As a general rule they do not get started at all. We are not a genial or responsive race, and are inclined to be a little suspicious of our neighbours, and are resentful and annoyed when accosted by a perfect stranger when travelling. We prefer to settle into our corner and become engrossed in a book ; or we conceal ourselves behind our newspaper and efface ourselves as long as possible from a vulgar and inquisitive world. We even resent another person getting into the carriage at all ; we call it "our carriage," and assume it to be our exclusive possession.

The man opposite me had been regaling me with a recital of his travels and adventures in various parts of the world ; he seemed to have been everywhere, and could tell a yarn well. Then he began

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talking about Spiritualism, saying that he himself did not believe in it, but that he had a brother, a minister, who was "up to the neck" in it, and who could think and speak and write of hardly anything else. After a spell of this theme, my fellow-passenger made the discovery that I had been ill, and at once became deeply sympathetic, and unfolded all manner of remedies and recipes which he himself had taken with miraculous effects. It was at this point that the big man got in, and after an interval of grumpy taciturnity, during which he emitted nothing but grunts in reply to my talkative friend's overtures, he suddenly became more responsive, and began to join in the general conversation.

I became filled with confusion, and must have blushed all over, from the state of my feelings, when I found myself and my recent illness made the sole topic of remark for the next fifty miles or so. My first friend had recommended open windows at night as a sure and certain cure for insomnia. This roused the big man to almost purple indignation, and he began with intense earnestness to implore me not to believe in this "fresh-air nonsense." He declared that we had far too much fresh air, that we were infatuated with fresh air, that doctors were faddists on the subject of fresh air, that we did not require fresh air, that more people died of fresh air than from any disease under the sun. And then, leaning towards me with infinite solicitude, he said: "You take my advice. I know what I'm talking about. I speak from experience. If you find you can't

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sleep, put a silk handkerchief over your eyes and keep the window shut, and you'll be over in five minutes. Never known it to fail. Capital plan. Infallible remedy. But fresh air? Bah! Don't have any of it; keeps you awake all night!" And having uttered this declaration with immense impressiveness, he glared at my friend opposite as at a person of most inferior intellect, and subsided into his own corner with the air of a man who has performed a public duty and conferred a universal benefit.

But his words, though I did not believe them, gave me an opportunity for quiet meditation. I began to think how in comparatively recent years the open air has become a kind of cult; how vast numbers of books have been written about the charms of the open road; how scores of people go into ecstasies over the joys of tramping; how the cycling tour, the walking tour, the camping holiday, the caravan holiday, have become almost a mania; and I wondered how far all this was a craze, and how far it represented a real enthusiasm for the life of a tramp. Most of us are too fond of our regular routine, our home comforts, our cherished luxuries, to forego them at the bidding or suggestion of a book on the delights and benefits of a holiday in the open. A holiday—yes, perhaps; a week or a fortnight at most; but as a permanency—how then? There would seem to be a note of insincerity—not conscious or intentional, perhaps—about some of these open-air ecstasies. I fear that Stevenson has

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had a deal to do with it. He did not begin the business, but he gave it an enormous impetus, and ever since his *Travels with a Donkey* and *An Inland Voyage* there has been an ever-increasing number of volumes about the exhilaration of the open road. All manner of folk, charmed with the adventures of R.L.S. and Modestine, have ardently desired to purchase a sleeping-sack and sleep under the stars. I frankly confess I am one of them. I am an abandoned admirer of these two exquisite little books. Ever since I read them first, I have always wanted to tramp or cycle the roads; a caravan has been as much an object of envy as a magic carpet; a canoe has seemed like a fairy vessel that might land me on some enchanted ground; and a barge on a canal has been "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever."

And yet there are misgivings. There is a life of the open road which is alluring and wonderful for a while—in the summer, when the days are long and the sun is warm and bright; but is not this rage for it largely a literary business, an amateur affair, a pumped-up enthusiasm? There was a period when the West End of London took to "slumming" as a distraction and a diversion, and its exponents deemed themselves highly commendable people actuated by the purest motives, and were, no doubt, visited by waves of sincerest emotion in their well-clad bosoms. But the craze did not last; the slum did not prove attractive; the West End had charms which the East End failed to provide, and these excellent folk

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made the sudden discovery that charity begins much nearer home.

Oh! I feel like a traitor, writing like this—mean and horrid and ungrateful exceedingly! No man has enjoyed the open road more than I; it has given me some of my happiest hours, and I revel in it still. There is nothing I would love more than to select some fair and interesting county, and to walk its roads for a week or so, visiting its places of beauty, making pilgrimages to its houses of literary or historical interest. It is not advancing years that make me a little suspicious of the ecstasies of the open roaders; I am ready for adventure yet, and have not lost the appeal of the call of the wild. But these panegyrics—

“ Give the face of earth around,
And the road before me ”

(oh, rare R.L.S.!)—are not these panegyrics mostly written in the summer, or with the memory of sunshiny seasons flooding the mind with golden radiance? Would any one of these open roaders advocate an all-the-year-round tramp's life? What of the weariness and hunger of the genuine trumper, the forlorn creature without a “ brown ” in his pocket, out-at-elbows, with a hat like a scarecrow, a costume of “ looped and windowed raggedness,” with no prospect of a snug village inn at the end of the day, but only a bed in a barn or even in a ditch, his only lullaby—

“ The bleak music of that old stone wall ”?

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There are rain and wind and cold to encounter, and the countryside is hardly a hospitable place to the "poor houseless wretches" in the "pitiless storm," seeking a precarious livelihood by their wits.

The lure of the open road—do I not know it? Have I not felt it? Yes, but I am only an amateur tramp, after all. I have a home to go to, a sufficient larder, a warm fireside. It is a different thing altogether to take to the road as a pastime, with stout boots and comfortable tweeds, with the picture of the village inn at the end of the day. What an ecstatic moment that is, when, after a day's tramp in the hot sun, or after buffeting a head wind on a bicycle for eight hours or so, you enter the porch of the inn weary in every limb and hungry as a hunter, and the delicious sound of sizzling ham greets your ears and the smell of it titillates your nostrils, and in a few minutes you are "falling to" with an appetite like a menagerie. And when the meal is over you light your pipe and stroll out to the old stone bridge across the stream, watching the trout dart to and fro, while the setting sun lights up the fields and hills and houses and the running water with the glow of Fairyland. And then the moon sails up and the stars come out, and you might expect to see Ariel or Puck at any moment flitting among the trees of the wood. Who would not be an open reader when he is thus at peace with all the world?

MY FIRST HOUSE

I HAVE had many ambitions in my time—a circus clown, a cab-driver, an actor, an artist, a pirate, all these have made their appeal to my erratic bosom ; but I once had an ambition to be an architect which, while it lasted, outshone all the rest. I was always drawing plans of one sort or another. I bought a vast drawing-board, immense sheets of paper, crowds of drawing-pins, lumps of india-rubber of various shapes, cakes of Indian ink, mapping-pens, rulers and squares and compasses, all the paraphernalia. The outfit was pretty complete, the desire burned strongly, but somehow the Fates were not propitious.

I was particularly anxious to design a house, a real dwelling-house, and I covered reams in my endeavours. Some of them were really not bad. One might have lived in the ground-floor flat if I had remembered that every room requires at least one door ; the bedrooms would have been delightful if I had not omitted the staircase. I still have the dream of the design for a house at times, but it is not yet put upon paper with proportions and measurements to scale. But I will tell you this much about it : there is to be a verandah in front, and a good wide entrance porch, with a roomy cloak-room ; there is to be one large living-room occupying the whole of the ground-floor, the kitchen premises being at the

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rear. In this living-room there is to be a huge old-fashioned fireplace—an open fireplace, if you please; none of your bars and ribs and smoke-screens and rattling fire-irons, but a fireplace that will burn logs and peat, with an iron hook for a kettle swinging on a kind of gallows arrangement, a chimney wide enough to drive a cab through, a chimney which is a cavern of yawning blackness; and there are to be deep recesses on either side of the fire where comfortable chairs can be set, so that folk can sit in a semicircle round the blaze. The ceiling of the living-room must be low, with open wooden beams or rafters from which hams may hang, or anything diffusing an appetizing fragrance; a staircase is to rise direct from the living-room to a gallery running right round, with bedrooms off the gallery. ("But what about your low ceiling with pendulous hams? If there is to be a gallery, how on earth . . ."—thus my wife interpolates.) Yes, yes; I know. I am aware of the difficulty, the incongruity, the disparity, the impropriety, the—what you will; but it will all come right when I get a-going. As I said before, this is not yet an actual design; it is a dream, and dreams often suffer from certain distortions. I see that living-room with singular distinctness. The bedrooms, I am bound to admit, have a certain haziness about them; they will be charming when you get there, but staircases have always been my difficulty. As for the ceiling, the open beams and rafters, and the gallery, well—er—well, yes, of course, perhaps a skylight may play a part in the scheme;

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but it is all right in my dream, and it is highly dangerous to wake a man in the middle of a dream; you might derange something. ("Deranged already in this case!"—thus my wife again, bless her.)

But what I really set out to write about was the first house of my very own that I actually lived in. I had hitherto dwelt in lodgings. Very good rooms they were, too—large, airy, comfortable, commanding a view of public gardens. My landlady was a dear, and her three daughters, each of whom waited on me in turn. . . . (In view of my wife's interpolations I will say no more on this head.) Still, I longed for a tent of my own. It was a foolish longing, my income being as slender as my figure in those days; and besides, a house wasn't in the least necessary. However, I was set upon the change, and when an old friend came in one day and told me there was a good house to rent, I went right away to look at it, and having looked at it I took it, and having taken it I moved in.

Is there any house in the world like unto one's first house? Is there any love so rich and rare as a first love? My first house was an enchanted palace. It stood on the edge of the country. *Radford Fields* was its name, and the fields themselves, green as emerald, stretched away for miles from the border of my garden. It was a house of red brick, not gross and staring red brick, but subdued, toned, mellowed, with a suggestion of antiquity in the mossy hieroglyphics which here and there showed upon the walls. I was pleased with the two living-rooms—one

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in front, one at the back. The front one was my dining-room—spacious and airy, with a bow window looking straight at a house where George Eliot used to visit, and where Ralph Waldo Emerson once came to see the writer of *Adam Bede*. My furniture was scanty but sufficient—a table, half-a-dozen rush-bottomed chairs, a sofa, and an ingenious contrivance by which what was originally two cupboards was cut in half, so that while I still had the two cupboards, I had also an excellent sideboard and the foundation of a book-case.

The back-room was my study. Ah, what a room it was! I have never had a study like it since, and never shall. It was a big room, far too big for a fellow of my size, but I enjoyed walking up and down in it in profound meditation composing my discourses. A table stood in the middle, but it seemed lost in space. Books adorned one wall, but they looked a handful in that acreage of wall-paper. What pleased me most was the garden. My study window looked into the garden. There was a little alcove at one end of the room from whose door a flight of steps descended to a terrace. Yes, a terrace, with stone balustrade and stone urns at either end, and a flight of stone stairs leading to a lower level. How I revelled in that terrace! My old friend who had told me about the house gave me a garden seat, which was placed upon the terrace, and there I would often sit smoking my pipe in vast content as I proudly surveyed my demesne. A lawn stretched from the stone stairs of the terrace to a

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large tree overshadowing a small tool-shed. Then a hedge divided the lawn and flower-garden from the kitchen-garden, which was prolific in peas, beans, lettuces, carrots, turnips, cabbages, cauliflowers, leeks, gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries, red and black currants. Oh, we could grow things in that garden, I can tell you! My housekeeper, a melancholy widow of mature years and hapless aspect, would go down every morning to the kitchen-garden with a basket on her arm and Monty (my fox terrier) tugging at her skirts, and return with a display of produce that would have been no discredit to the parterres of Sutherland or Buccleuch.

There I lived for eighteen months in happy proprietorship, and then I was ruthlessly uprooted and transferred to another town. I have had three or four houses since, but there is none quite like my first house; and even if I should live to occupy a mansion—an unlikely contingency—I shall still look back with tender affection and wistful regret to golden memories of *Radford Fields*.

OCTOBER

A FINE October is one of the most beautiful and inspiriting months in the year. It is a month that has a quality and an atmosphere all its own. The sky has a look of being farther away, disclosing depth upon depth of pale blue, swimming in translucent haze. The sun is less fiery and scorching; instead of beating like an open furnace upon the cheek, it seems to bathe and envelop the whole body with a pervasive and genial glow. Silvery threads of gossamer float through the quiet air. In the still evenings, as you walk in country roads or on the outskirts of the town, these silken threads come drifting across the face, tickling the nose and entangling the eyelashes, and making you screw up your eyes in involuntary self-protection.

October is a great artist. There is a wonderful richness upon the corn—tawny, like a lion's mane—a mellow colouring over the fields, a riot of beauty and tint upon the yellowing and reddening leaves. The leaves fall with a gentle fluttering through the still autumn air; they follow you with a crisp dry patter down the road in every puff of wind. The odours of the moist earth rise up with a strange pungency, insistent, penetrating, like the smell of some ancient church whose very stones breathe out history. The sunsets are more fiery than in summer;

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they linger longer in the quiet evening skies, painting their colours with a depth and richness like those of the Old Masters. The year is loth to depart; the trail of summer glory is long drawn out in gorgeous lines over the landscape, reluctant to withdraw.

It is singular that while autumn preaches of dissolution and decay, man returns to his work in that season with a hopefulness and vigour and resolve unknown to any other season of the year. One might naturally suppose that he would be inclined to sadness, and resign himself to melancholy, with all these signs of the dying year around him. But autumn makes him a philosopher. She opens inward eyes, and man sees more than the falling leaf and the evidences of decay.

The sermon of autumn is not wholly of decay. She preaches of a decay that feeds the very vitals of creation, and nourishes the earth with the hope and expectancy of more abundant life. Spring, with all its freshness and sense of overflowing joy, brings a curious feebleness to man, making him disinclined for strenuous toil and walk with dragging step, as if unable to respond adequately to the appeal of the awakening life around him. His own vitality is depressed, while that of Nature is in the ascendant. The loveliness of spring is almost too overwhelming. It has a kind of piercing quality more truly pathetic than the falling of ten thousand autumn leaves.

The truth is that autumn brings a deeper message than spring. It is more comprehensive. It takes in life full circle. It has seen it all. The touch of

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sorrow is needed to complete the full experience of life; and when we know life in its wholeness, taking into our purview its shadows as well as its bright and sunny hours, we are more in a humour to be serene and happy and content. It is youth which is at the mercy of its own tumultuous thoughts and emotions; it has not learned to sort them out and discern their meaning. Youth rages with divine revolt against the mere suggestion of death and decay. It feels itself immortal. But autumn tells us that youth has no need to revolt at death; it can give death welcome, because it can see through its hollow ribs and its mocking grin. The joke is on man's side, because in his highest moments he feels that it is not possible that death should hold him. But death will have him, for all that—have him, but not hold him. This is the deeper message of autumn. She teaches us that we cannot run away from the inevitable, and it is only when we face up to it that we cease to fear it.

In spite of falling leaf and barren boughs and empty furrows, autumn comes to tell us of fulfilment and of continuity. The barrenness is but a show. Besides, man does not reap all the gold of the year for nought. Every ripe sheaf of corn, every ruddy-cheeked apple, every bloomy fruit, is the reward of his labours. Tennyson was right when he wrote of "the happy autumn fields." What can be jollier than an orchard in October? What more full of comfort and satisfaction than the great wain creaking under its load of sheaves? Harvest is a time of

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deep thanksgiving, and the spectacle of barren fields is an invitation to further toil.

We are too much deceived by the accompaniments of autumn, just as we are staggered and overwhelmed by the grim trappings and accompaniments of death. It looks so like the end of all things, and there are those who are bold enough to declare that it is the end of all things. The human heart will not have it so, and the human heart deserves a hearing. Autumn will not have it so either. She hands us over into the icy clutch of winter, but she does it with such jollity and laughter and rollicking exuberance that we are sure she knows a thing or two, and can trust her kindly and smiling face not to consign us to an ogre or a fiend, still less to sheer oblivion and darkness. I have seen the fire lick up the body I have loved in the furnace of the crematorium, and, indeed, it seemed the end of all things when a few hours later I looked upon a casket filled with charred bones and ashes. But the fire that produced those ashes was nothing to the fire of affection and thought of which that body was once the medium, and if a man tells me that the greater fire can itself be consumed, I am at least smitten with an immense surprise. Autumn is a nobler preacher than that, and when I stand amid the icy walls of winter and see the skeletons of a former beauty, I think of her warm-hearted and happy message which bids me mingle hope with my sorrow.

Autumn is a difficult theme for a poet. Most of the poets are successful and true enough when they

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write about spring and summer, but autumn somehow escapes out of their hands. Many poets have described autumn, and described her magnificently; but very few have given us the *feel* of autumn. Perhaps that is a feat impossible in words. Sir William Watson has described her in matchless phrases. He speaks of "the storm-dismantled forest choir," of "thy ruinous boughs and drifted foliage wet"; he tells us how—

"At thy mute signal, leaf by golden leaf,
Crumbles the gorgeous year,"

and refers to autumn as the "voice of everything that perishes," and the "soul of all regret." It is perfect as description; but the genuine feel of autumn is not produced or conveyed by an accumulation of epithets. Keats is equally successful in sheer beauty of description, but even he, miracle-worker in words though he be, does not quite give us the real autumn. Longfellow's lines are worthy of more recognition than they have sometimes received :

"There is a beautiful spirit breathing now
Its mellow richness on the clustered trees,
And from a beaker full of richest dyes
Pouring new glory on the autumn woods,
And dipping in warm light the pillared clouds.
Morn on the mountain, like a summer bird,
Lifts up her purple wing, and in the vales
The gentle wind, a sweet and passionate wooer,
Kisses the blushing leaf, and stirs up life
Within the solemn woods of ash deep-crimsoned,
And silver beech, and maple yellow-leaved,
Where autumn, like a faint old man, sits down
By the wayside a-weary."

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I think that Tom Hood manages to give us the feel of autumn more successfully than most:

“ I saw old autumn in the misty morn
Stand shadowless like silence, listening
To silence, for no lonely bird would sing
Into his hollow ear from woods forlorn,
Nor lowly hedge, nor solitary thorn ;
Shaking his languid locks all dewy bright
With tangled gossamer that fell by night,
Pearling his coronet of golden corn.

* * * *

Alone, alone,
Upon a mossy stone,
She sits and reckons up the dead and gone
With the last leaves for a love rosary,
Whilst all the withered world looks drearily
Like a dim picture of the drowned past
In the hushed mind’s mysterious far away,
Doubtful what ghostly thing will steal the last
Into that distance, grey upon the grey.”

But even the poets have missed the deeper message of the month, save, perhaps, Shelley with his two lines :

“ Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken to new birth.”

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HOLIDAYS

A HOLIDAY is really a help to wholeness, a contribution to health. “Holyday” and “holiday” are almost the same thing. The old holy day *was* a holiday. It was associated with some sacred celebration or festival, and the people had a holiday to attend it. To-day we fight shy of the word “holy” and of the ideas associated with it. It is because we have utterly misconceived those ideas, or because we have been nauseated by caricatures of holiness, and have grown suspicious of it. We have supposed that there is a lack of robustness about it, or that it involves something which is impossible for average human nature as we know it. But holy simply means healthy; and a holy man is just a healthy man, a man with body, mind, and spirit working in happy unison on behalf of things that minister to health.

A man must periodically get away from his work in order that he may return to it with greater vigour, with fresh power, with new possibilities of success. A holiday is a man’s return to himself. The multitude do not go on holiday for play and pleasure alone, or for rest and change in themselves. These things are sought as a means of life, and a holiday that does not result in an increase of life is no holiday at all. It is a disaster.

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We seek occasional freedom from routine in order to make the routine more bearable. We speak of recreation, but the only legitimate recreation is that which re-creates. The welcome sojourn by the sea or among the hills is to give new force and vigour to the body, fresh ideas to the mind, stimulus to the heart. In these days of strain, and worry, and weariness, and haste the break is needed more than ever; and we want to use the energy we have stored up in shouldering our burdens once more, and facing our duties with the hope and zest that change and rest and freedom always bring in their train when they are wisely used.

A great many folk are in the habit of associating holiness with gloom, monotony, and restraint. They imagine that the life of goodness must be very flat, tame, and uninteresting. I suppose it is possible to make it so; but if we do make it so, we do it in complete defiance of the true idea of goodness. In the Bible goodness is always associated with happiness. The remarkable thing would be if it were otherwise. If holiness be healthiness, it would be strange if happiness did not follow. No doubt there are many things in human experience that tend to modify happiness, sometimes to obscure it and even to put it under temporary eclipse; but when all is said and done, it is the healthy man who stands the best chance of obtaining it. Even when health is a struggle, whether it be physical, mental, or spiritual health, there is far more real joy for the man who braces himself for the struggle than for the man who

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is indifferent to it or abandons it in despair. Probably the happiest men in the world when the storm broke in August, 1914, and during the years that followed, were the men who were fighting in a great cause. Nothing was able to eclipse their high spirits. Under the worst of circumstances and in the most terrible of conditions there are always some men whose courage and buoyancy and exuberance give a stimulus to all the rest, and keep them from giving way. During the frightful three months endured by Shackleton's men on Elephant Island there was one man especially among the twenty-two whose persistent gaiety and fortitude acted like a tonic to the others, and helped them to hope and to endure. It is always so.

You hear it said of a man sometimes, "What a spirit he has!" You hear it said of a man undergoing prolonged suffering, "It is his spirit that keeps him up!" It is just that. It is the healthy part of him, the *holy* part of him, that preserves the whole organism and keeps it from swift decay. In the sorrowful loneliness of exile, cut off from all old associations and boon companions, a man will recover himself and brace himself to endure by recalling happier times and hoping for their return. A poet tells us that "sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." But that always seems to me the lowest depth of ingratitude.

If health and happiness be akin, if there is some subtle affinity between holiness and hilarity, then I begin to understand the meaning of that fine old

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phrase, "The beauty of holiness." There is a strong æsthetic strain in human nature. There is a kind of divine artistry in the spiritual life. There is a *beauty* of healthiness. Is there anything more beautiful than the body of a healthy child? The moulded limbs, the fresh young lips, the luminous eyes with their unshadowed gaze, the lithe, swift, easy movement—are they not full of nameless grace? Is there anything more beautiful than a mind alert and fertile with true, sweet thoughts; alive with unselfish plans and generous purposes; filled with the genius of ideas that make for right, wise, wholesome, and exuberant living? Is there anything more beautiful than a heart warm with pure and sweet affections, happy impulses, rich enthusiasms, lofty ideals, beating ever with a rare and overflowing humanity? These are parts of the beauty of healthiness, and they are for ever being translated into the visible poetry of human things.

The desire of the artist is to make things perfect. It needs constant practice, toil, perseverance. The beauty and symmetry and suppleness of the body cannot be maintained without practice. It is a question largely of diet and gymnastic exercise. We can hardly expect any higher kind of beauty without similar exercise and practice. If a man gives up thought and study, if he be slack in duty and unfaithful in responsibility, if he gives up feeding his sense of reverence and wonder and worship, he has no right to expect that the beauty of holiness or healthiness will grow upon him automatically. No

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man can grow in grace who abandons the means of grace. And the means of grace are many.

We have seen with astonishment what systematic training can do for the bodies of men ; it would be a thousand pities if we took less trouble to fight the worse foes of life.

If holiness be healthiness, we shall naturally associate it with utility. Those who go on holiday derive various benefits which are to be turned into the practical work of life. Those benefits include bodily reinforcement, mental quickening, moral strengthening, spiritual readiness. If we miss or neglect or despise any of these it is our own sore loss, and the community is the poorer by that much of power which we might have contributed to its vitality. We ought to keep steadily in view the practical side of holiness ; otherwise it is apt to degenerate into a mawkish sentiment and a pithless piety hardly to be distinguished from superstition or hypocrisy. Holiness or healthiness is utility. A great Church makes much of "holy water." It is water that has been "blessed" by a priest. A few words have been muttered over it, and henceforth the water is "holy." That may be consecration ; but to me it savours more of incantation. I would not willingly think or speak lightly of another man's form of religion or of any part of its ritual, however singular it may be ; but I am bound to say that for myself the only and truly "holy water" is that which slakes some poor man's thirst—the cup of cold water offered to "one of these little ones."

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That is indeed holy water, because it has ministered to a real need.

The true healthiness—"holiness"—is not occasional, but habitual. It is not some mood of lofty contemplation or an attitude of reverence and worship limited to certain times and seasons; it is rather a spirit of health and power that links itself on to all the common work of the world, and determines the quality and provides the driving force of the day's business. This is the real philosophy of holidays; it is a breathing space in the midst of our toil and weariness that puts fresh health into our exhausted nature, enabling us to return to our moral selves and to "carry on" with new vigour and endurance and resolve.

* * * *

And now, having delivered my small homily, let me turn my attention to packing. For packing is one of those dismal but necessary preliminaries to a holiday which threaten to turn the hair prematurely grey. There is probably nothing, save golf, that tends so much to enlarge a man's vocabulary. Packing, so the experts tell me, is a fine art. It may be so for the expert; but for me it is less an art than an earthquake. I gather out everything I want, or think I want, on the floor and on the bed; and when I turn to look at it I am convinced that nothing but a pantechnic van can possibly remove the goods. And I do not propose to hire a pantechnic van; I cannot even afford a cab. What I pack I must carry. Fortunately the war has taught me some-

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thing: it has taught me what I can do without. I have reduced my wants to a minimum. So that now, having profited to this extent at least by the cataclysm that has overtaken an unhappy continent, I no longer worry about the possibilities of a pantech-nicon van, but look out my slimmest suit-case or kit-bag and have done with the whole business. I have some thoughts, one of these days, of going off for a month with nothing but a knapsack and a walking-stick. "But what about your washing?" asks my practical-minded wife.

Apropos of which pertinent, or rather impertinent, question, let me tell you a story. A relative of mine once went away for a week, and his wife made him promise solemnly that he would put on a clean shirt every day. Rather aghast at the prospect, yet being a prudent man, he made the required promise. But his prudence was exceeded by his absent-mindedness. On his return home at the end of the week his wife noticed that he looked much stouter than when he went away. The reason thereof appeared at bed-time. He had certainly put on a clean shirt every day, but he had forgotten to take off the dirty ones. I think, on the whole, therefore, a knapsack may suffice when I go upon my travels. One change, a tooth-brush, and a dictionary ought to be enough for any reasonable person.

CHRISTMAS DAY

CHRISTMAS DAY! What an indefinable charm there is in the very words, and what a world of happy memories they recall! It is an unfailing sign of advancing years when one loses one's zest for Christmas. There was a time when I looked forward to it, and prepared for it in a secret ecstasy of delight. These preparations began weeks before the appropriate time, and I started publishing my feelings, so to speak, as early as October, as if I were a Christmas number eager to be first in the field. They began, these preparations, under the lid of my desk at school, where I kept a calendar fastened with drawing-pins, whose days I ticked off with feverish anticipation as they crawled and bedraggled themselves along. Time generally flew, but when I wanted anything very much, looking forward to a day when something wonderful and beautiful and eminently desirable was to happen, the clock seemed to stand still. I experienced an abnormal thrill when I dived beneath the lid of my desk, supporting it painfully but successfully with the occiput, being supposed by an unsuspicious and unimaginative dominie to be raking the contents of the desk for an exercise-book or a nib, when in reality I was scoring off another day with a copying-ink pencil, duly sucked for the occasion, with dire results for the tongue, that the

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calendar might be intimidated with a truly purple defiance.

I had, of course, always understood that Christmas Day had tender and hallowed associations, and deep down in my young heart I felt the poetry and romance of the time. One of the first Scripture lessons I ever learned at school was the chapter in Matthew that tells of the wondrous Babe, and the star in the east, and the wise men, and the costly gifts, and the perfidious Herod, and the awful massacre of little children, and Rachel weeping and refusing to be comforted "because they were not"; and since that hour Christmas has always had a kind of glamour and of mystery, and I have felt its sacredness without understanding it. I would go out into the dark on Christmas Eve, and look up at the crowded sky, and wonder which was "His star." You can imagine, then, how my heart almost stood still in listening wonder when in later years I heard a great preacher finish his Christmas sermon with these words: "His star! Which is His? How can I tell it when the whole sky burns with countless lamps? The sky staggers under its weight, its load of worlds! His star! Which is His? Are they not all His—His by every right? The great ones, palaces of infinite magnitude, and the tiny specks that lie like pollen scattered on the highways of the universe—are they not all His? I watched them yesternight when they were out in all their Christmas pomp, and wondered which was His. Some ranked in geometric file and order, as if awaiting the survey

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of the King ; others leaping, glittering, as if keeping some holy revel in halls of glory ! Said I but last night, Which is His—quite His—His as others cannot be ? Do they not all lead one way, even to the Bethlehem of new life, new suffering, new heavens ? Would any star lead me but to Him ? Are they not all Bethlehem guides ? If they could lead me elsewhere, it would be I who led, not the stars. Man can force every star to light him to the devil. Men have so used sunshine and music and love ; men have paved their way to hell with the very jewels of heaven. His star—His one star—which is it ? That one blazing in the northern sky, steadfast, vigilant, eager to say what never can be spoken ? Is that His ? Or that white world shining in the lustrous south like a diamond glowing on the breast of heaven ? That must be His. I want to know which is His. Is it that babe-star, quite the least in the household of worlds ? Has that infant light come to guide the erring earth back to the track of worlds obedient ? They are millions thick on that great blue dome. I will ask my heart. The heart beats the best telescope. Tell me, fond heart, which is His star ? Speak to me in my mother tongue. Tell me, as my mother would have told me, which is His—quietly, quietly. Hark ! the heart says : ‘That star is His which leads thee to self-sacrifice, to service for others, to momentary humiliation. That star is His which leads thee to Himself.’ Bless thee, fond heart. Thou hast spoken like my mother.” Thus the preacher

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ended. It was very dramatic, very moving, infinitely tender, the very poetry and passion of sacred speech; the simple words touched a chord in one hearer at least which vibrates in him still, though the day when he heard them is thirty years ago.

Christmas is pre-eminently the children's time. The unfailing glamour of it is repeated year by year, until the inevitable hour comes when the family circle is broken, and the old home is left behind, and the members of it are scattered to the four corners of the world. A kindly Providence, however, has so arranged that the glory never quite departs; for not only do the sacred associations of the day abide for ever, but a time may come when we live our former sensations over again in a less exuberant form in the enjoyment of our own children, and perhaps there is a deeper and more permanent joy in this than in the boisterous hilarity that belonged to an earlier time. It is in the nature of things that the first fine careless rapture cannot be repeated or retained, but it seems to me a species of ingratitude to mourn over the change when the former glow fades into the light of common day. After all, the light of common day is a very welcome and beautiful illumination, and the original rapture is not altogether lost; it remains not only in memory, but is woven into the fabric of character, and if we come into the sober enjoyment and more serene satisfaction of "the years that bring the philosophic mind," we still have the solace of knowing that we have had the glow of youth. Life is all of a piece. What we have had we have

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had, and the envious years cannot steal that satisfaction.

I like a snow-bound Christmas. It seems more appropriate somehow. We used to get those snowy Christmas Days more often than we do now. Mayhap the seasons are changing, perhaps some astronomical conjunction is responsible for a difference in weather conditions. But the kind of scene depicted on the typical Christmas card is the thing—a scene in which thick flakes are falling from a leaden sky, while a group of “Waits,” muffled to the throat in vast woollen comforters, discourse sweet music before a cottage, whose windows, lit from within, cast a yellow glare upon the snow, and a glimpse is afforded of red and white berries hanging from the ceiling, and of happy faces gathered around a fire of blazing logs. It is the good old-fashioned Christmas beloved of Dickens, and depicted by him in imperishable pigments and with enormous gusto in so many of his pages. How many times have I played blind-man’s buff with Scrooge’s nephew and the plump sister in the lace tucker in *A Christmas Carol*! How many times have I sat with Gabriel Grub in the Goblins’ Cavern in the bowels of the earth, and watched the panorama unfolded for his behoof, and seen the unhappy Sexton writhe in agony when the liquid fire was poured down his throat! How many times have I been one of the circle round the heaped-up fire at Manor Farm in Dingley Dell, when the four Pickwickians revelled in the boundless hospitality of old Wardle! How many times, too, have I watched

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Sam Weller and the guard of the Muggleton coach “endeavouring to insinuate into the fore-boot a huge cod-fish several sizes too large for it, which is snugly packed up in a long brown basket, with a layer of straw over the top. . . . Mr. Weller and the guard try to squeeze the cod-fish into the boot, first head first, then tail first, and then top upwards, and then bottom upwards, and then sideways, and then longways, all of which artifices the implacable cod-fish sturdily resists, until the guard accidentally hits him in the very middle of the basket, whereupon he suddenly disappears into the boot, and with him the head and shoulders of the guard himself, who, not calculating upon so sudden a cessation of the passive resistance of the cod-fish, experiences a very unexpected shock, to the unsmotherable delight of all the porters and bystanders.” The immortal account of it all appears in chapter xxviii. of *The Pickwick Papers*—a good-humoured Christmas chapter, Dickens calls it; and the man who can read it without a smile must have a brain of leather and a soul of putty.

Oh, it is a kindly, tender, sweet, and happy time, is Christmas! There is the profound secrecy and mystery of buying presents; the hanging of the mistletoe; the making of the mince-meat and the stirring of the pudding; the hanging-up of the stockings; the Christmas dinner, when feats of gastronomy are performed by youthful digestions which give rise to parental surmisings that “the subsequent proceedings will interest them no more!” The favourite uncle arrives with his cheery laugh and an

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armful of parcels, distributing bright new shillings to the bairns, telling stories round the fire, and making their flesh creep with the yarn they have heard a score of times, but which never stales in repetition, about an awesome being called "The Bugaboo," who comes and seats himself on children's chests at night when they have partaken too freely of Christmas fare. Why, bless me, I think I hear my dear old uncle's voice still as he tells his tale with dramatic flourishes, and I see myself creeping all a-quake up the stairs to bed, "with the breath of the bogey in my hair!"

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THE beginning of a new year provides a suitable opportunity for thinking about the various epochs and critical hours that mark the passage of experience. A new year is, after all, only an artificial boundary. Calendars and almanacs are just conveniences by which to mark our dates and fix our engagements. Time itself is not affected by them any more than the river is affected by the fields and villages and towns upon its banks. It flows on unceasingly all the while, and nothing can check its flow.

But it is rather an appalling thing to sit down and think of the great river of time gliding perpetually and inexorably along, bearing everybody and everything away to the vast ocean. It has a paralyzing effect to try to conceive of time as a huge abstraction, unending, unbeginning. It is like trying to imagine space. We should go out of our heads if we tried to concentrate our thoughts upon space, that immensity upon which no man can lay a measuring line; that infinite inane, as Carlyle calls it; that awful abyss into which a man would fall if he slipped over the edge of the world. And so, instead of that paralyzing process of thinking *in vacuo*, we try to fix our thoughts by turning them to the little bits of the world we know, the familiar

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places, the towns we live in, the countryside we have walked in, the hills whose outline is familiar to us, the woods we have wandered in, the homes we inhabit. This fixing and concentrating of our thoughts helps to keep us sane. And so, when we think of time, we do not want to think of it in that large and terrifying way which imagines it as a resistless flood, "an ever-rolling stream that bears all its sons away." We rather think of it in the calendar way, the almanac fashion, as a series of definite times—birthdays, wedding-days, Sundays and weekdays, Bank Holidays, Christmas Day, New Year's Day.

Emerson tells us that no man has learned anything rightly until he knows that every day is Doomsday. It is quite true. But I should be very sorry, all the same, if when I looked at my calendar or diary every morning I found the grim reminder staring me in the face, This is Doomsday, and don't you forget it! I should not feel very fit for my morning's work after that. I want something a little more cheering and encouraging. I want something to brace me up and give me confidence, not to make me sit down and brood or to go about my work as if I were old Atlas carrying the world on his back. I don't want some pedantic philosopher to come and tell me that a new year has no real existence. I am a calendar man, and I tell myself that the first of January is a new year in very truth; and a new year is a new chance, a fresh opportunity, another and a propitious occasion.

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I want if I can to begin a new year as I would fain begin a new day—in a spirit of confidence and hope. The days are not haphazard, though they look like it. The things that happen come at the right time, and there is a proper time for everything. If we could only believe this and understand it, if we could only see life from its higher side, how much richer would be our confidence, how much brighter our hope! We are confused by the tumult round about us. We are distracted by the busy and bewildering foreground. Back yonder stand the mountains of thought and aspiration, and we must climb them sometimes if we want to get the right lie of the land, the true perspective of our life. School days; dream days; days of planning and working and struggling; days of temptation and desire and ambition; days of love and aspiration; days of failure and dismay and defeat; days of suffering and sorrow; days of pain; days of conquest and joy—all these are working out some high destiny for us all.

The days of life cannot be purposeless. They are being directed to the best ends somehow. We have been told to discern the signs of the times. Then they must really have some sign. There must be something deep, something definite, something concrete and sustaining in them to discern. After all, there are only two choices in this matter. We may have an atheistic calendar, in which the days have no meaning, because they are not “linked each to each by natural piety,” in which case life is a mere chapter of accidents; or we may believe that the

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days and destinies of life are in higher hands than ours. No doubt it is hard to realize this when all the waves and billows are going over our heads, and when we are face to face with the blazing contradictions and staring incongruities of life. But we have to learn to take large and comprehensive views of the world's history. A great thinker has told us that all things are working together for good. He does not say for the best—there can be no best in a world like this—but for good. “The best is yet to be.” So many things are included in that “working together” that to our short sight they look like a tangle, a ravelled skein; and it is only when we believe that the universe has a plan and life a purpose that we can conceive of their being wrought into a pattern according to some vast, far-reaching, cosmic design.

“All sorts of things and weather
Must be taken in together,
To make up a year
And a sphere.”

Many things become gradually clearer to those who try to be faithful and to do their simple duty day by day. There is a vision at the back of every duty, and there is a duty resulting from every vision; and the doing of the duty helps to make the vision more and more real and vital.

No human experience is ever wasted. History is not thrown away, not a single detail of it. Experience is the great educator, and it is through the constant interplay of life's manifold forces that men and nations are brought into right relationships

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and are made to realize the responsibilities devolving upon them. A proverb says that experience teaches fools. The truth would rather seem to be that experience teaches everybody except fools. For it is certain that there are both men and nations who never seem to learn wisdom, despite the thunder of tremendous events and the lightning of shattering experiences. The times through which we have so recently passed ought at least to create in us the sober and steady mind, so that we do not give way to foolish criticism and premature judgment while a drama of such vast magnitude and inconceivable import is being worked out. The poet's exhortation is still true for us all in times of stress and apprehension :

“ Let us be patient ! These severe afflictions
Not from the ground arise,
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
Assume this dark disguise.
We see but dimly through the mists and vapours ;
Amid these earthly damps
What seem to us but sad funereal tapers
May be heaven's distant lamps.”

A wise man has said that “ Life, like war, is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best man nor the best general who makes the fewest false steps. He is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes. Forget mistakes. Organize victory out of mistakes.” The truth of that was borne out again and again during the years of war. We may prove the truth of it for ourselves during

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the progress of another year. We have our new chance offered to us, the prospect of a fresh start, the opportunity of a new beginning. I like that verse of Carlyle's :

“Here hath been dawning
Another blue day ;
Think : wilt thou let it
Slip useless away ?”

For my part, I need also the incitement of those other well-known lines of Goethe :

“Are you in earnest ? Seize this very minute ;
What you can do, or dream you can, begin it ;
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.
Only engage, and then the mind grows heated,
Begin, and then the work will be completed.”

Hard ? Yes, but not impossible. Slow, pedestrian workers like myself require just such a spur. Some lines of George Macdonald have often helped me :

“’Tis hard for man to rouse his spirit up—
It is the human creative agony,
Though but to hold the heart an empty cup,
Or tighten on the team the rigid rein.
Many will rather lie among the slain
Than creep through narrow ways the light to gain,
Than wake the will, and be born bitterly.”

Lines like those give one a sense of fellowship. The best men have always been strivers and fighters, and to read the record of their experience helps to diminish one's feeling of loneliness. Individuality is such an awful solitude. One understands the man who wrote so many centuries ago, “The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not

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intermeddle with its joy." But there is a fellowship of struggle, and in setting out upon the path of a new year I am conscious of the tramp of many footsteps beside my own. And that is company.

I did not intend to be quite so serious and didactic when I began to write this paper. Now that I read over what I have written I can trace an almost sermonic note, for which I am almost inclined to sit in sack-cloth and ashes. Yet, who knows? Oliver Wendell Holmes says that it is a good sign when a man gets cold feet when he is writing, and mine are desperately cold at this moment. Let me hope, therefore, that it is because the warmth has been escaping at the end of my pen.

BRIC-À-BRAC

CERTAIN words have always had a singular attraction for me, and I am utterly unable to explain why. The sound of them upon the tongue has something to do with it, I fancy, and the look of them upon the printed page; but probably there is some quaint and obscure association of ideas that lies at the bottom of the attraction. Odd-sounding, odd-looking words have a fascination of their own, even when they look and sound ugly, just as some curious-looking people, "with a caricature of a face" and a costume that belongs to antediluvian times, hold the eye with the very same fascination that the Ancient Mariner had for the Wedding Guest. I like terms that have a sort of barbaric look, that seem to have wandered into our language by some alien route, speaking of lands and of folk and of customs unknown, and wearing a robe of mystery. "Bric-à-brac" is one of these words or phrases. It is so very un-British, and does not seem at home in the waters of the well of English undefiled.

I wonder sometimes whether there is anything in the idea of reincarnation. Mrs. Annie Besant has written eloquently upon the subject, but I am not convinced. True, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy, especially in heaven, which is a place, or rather a

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state, many of us are in small danger of getting into. But when I hear or read of religious fads and heresies and oddities, particularly those that have a compelling fascination about them, like reincarnation and spiritualism and such-like bees in the bonnet, I always pull myself up short and read something by way of antidote, with a good, solid bottom of experience and common sense. I don't want to go ballooning about in ethereal realms and through highly coloured clouds of fantasy, when I am a particularly solid body, and need such mundane articles as a pair of trousers and at least two square meals a day. I think the melancholy futilities of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's spirit-rappings and ghost-seeings and telegrams from the unseen are a mighty poor exchange for Sherlock Holmes. But what I was going to say, when this sudden brain-wave carried me off my feet, was that of all these odd words that hold me so strongly, those that have an Oriental tang about them make the most vigorous onslaught. They set the thoughts racing, and I often find myself riding on an elephant in Ceylon, or being borne in a palanquin in China, or smoking cheroots in Burmah, or reclining on silken cushions and sipping sherbet in Persia, or threading my way through the hubbub and turmoil of a bazaar in Bagdad or Damascus.

"Bric-à-brac," for example, always transports me to lands across deserts and seas. As a matter of mere derivation, I believe there is nothing Eastern about it whatever. It is said to come from the French *de bric et de broc*, meaning "by hook or by

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crook." But even a dictionary has its limitations. It cannot prevent those mental excursions, those furious flights of fancy, those vast nose-dives and side-slips and loopings-of-the-loop of the imagination that a man can indulge in when sitting quietly in his own arm-chair when the lights are low, and the fire reveals strange scenes, and the grey smoke curls from his favourite briar. I have travelled far and fast at such times, and brought back wonderful gifts from Fairyland; and it is about the only kind of travel I shall ever be able to enjoy, unless someone so far forgets himself as to leave me the remnants of his estate. Travelling is an expensive business and immensely tiring, and home is at the back of your mind all the time; and I have seen more for nothing, and without moving from the chimney-corner, simply by pronouncing the mystic words, "abracadabra," "gazeeka," "chiaroscuro," "open sesame," or "bric-à-brac," than any perspiring Cook's tourist or any explorer in tropic forests and Arctic wilds.

I think if I had to spend a year on a desert island, and was only allowed one book, I would certainly choose a dictionary. It is a somewhat disconnected volume—not quite so jolting to the mind, though, as *Bradshaw's Railway Guide*—but what infinite suggestion there is in it and what wide horizons it unfolds! I have just looked up "bric-à-brac," not because I don't know what it means, but because I am anxious to know what a prosaic book like a dictionary will say about so essentially poetic a word.

Bric-à-Brac

It says simply, "Fancy-ware, curiosities, knick-knacks." There you are, you see—all the fun of the fair revealed as at the stroke of an enchanter's wand. Fancy-ware! Haven't I seen it? "A Sale of Useful and Fancy Articles!" Do I not know that sale? Nay, have I not been doomed for my sins to "open" it many a time? And thereupon a tempestuous bustle has ensued, and I have been lured into buying useful articles that I do not want, and fancy articles that afflict me like a nightmare for weeks afterwards; and in my native innocence and bashfulness, which obtuse people take for assumption or impertinence, I commit enormities which are poorly solaced by a sandwich and a cup of tea in the anteroom. "Knick-knacks!" How the word clatters in the brain, as if somebody had upset a dozen plates there! The man or woman who first thought of knick-knacks—I don't mean the word, but the atrocities it designates—should have a punishment that fits the crime indeed. "Something with boiling oil." I have seen homes that are full of them, cabinets that are crowded with them, walls that bristle with them, mantelpieces that groan with them. Bric-à-brac usually consists of brackets in corners, draped with something that looks like a fragment of the Union Jack or a strip of the Stars and Stripes, and supporting an antique vase (supposed to be dug out of the tomb of Rameses or a Saxon "barrow," but made in Worcester for the unwary, "springs to catch woodcocks") filled with peacocks' feathers, or Mexican grasses, or any object

Bric-à-Brac

that will act as a first-class dust-accumulator—the proprietor's pride, but the housemaid's heart-break. You may see bric-à-brac also assuming the form of a number of small objects from India or Japan, carved in ebony or ivory—a herd of buffaloes, a procession of elephants, a few sacred cows, a sort of Zoo set up in a cabinet, or preferably on a side-table which is not very strong in the legs, but subject to attacks of vertigo when anyone goes too near it. Or you may see bric-à-brac in the form of lumps of stone and bits of rock and pieces of crystal and chunks of quartz and other knobby specimens of geological enthusiasm, and their collector will exhibit them with pride and expatiate on their beauty or rarity, and will grieve over you as an abandoned soul if you are not instantly on fire with ecstasy and wonder.

I had a friend once who had a mania for bric-à-brac. It took a variety of forms. At one time it would be walking-sticks, and he amassed during this period a vast quantity of malaccas, and ash-woods, and cherry-woods, and oak-woods, and elm-woods, and shillelaghs, and other products of the stickmaker's art. Then he would grow tired of it, and give them away and sell them off, and start a new hobby. I remember a period when he dabbled in pewter. There were plates and mugs and jugs and snuff-boxes and tobacco-jars and coffee-pots and tea-pots and every conceivable kind of receptacle, all composed of pewter, and distributed about his house in every room in the most admired disorder. When he had wearied of this and had dispersed his

Bric-à-Brac

collection, a time arrived when you could hardly get into his house for suits of armour and weapons of war. You began by making the sudden acquaintance of half-a-dozen fully-accoutréed knights-in-armour in the hall, and after stumbling up against a glittering gentleman of the fourth century behind the front door, you barked your shins against the spurs and greaves of the Black Prince, and hung your hat on Joan of Arc, and had a violent concussion with Hubert de Burgh, and ripped half the buttons off your waistcoat in an endeavour to pass the protuberances of Guy of Warwick, and were nearly tattooed by the steel prongs of one of the Plantagenets. If you spent a night in the house during the craze it was a fearsome experience. You found the stairs guarded by a gigantic Crusader, and passed upward through a perfect grove of shields and spears and blunderbusses and bows and arrows and clubs belonging to savage tribes, until at length you arrived in your room to find a full-sized representation of a Zulu warrior at the foot of your bed, an array of obsolete pistols and other antique fire-arms on every wall, and a collection of assegais and tomahawks and curved hatchets and glittering daggers and gleaming scimitars arranged in artistic profusion and symmetry on every coign of vantage. If you slept without ill dreams amid this combination of arsenal and museum, it was a tribute to your nerves and a fine advertisement for your abstemious habits. But one could not help thinking of the man who, by way of accumulating interesting bric-à-brac, took to

Bric-à-Brac

collecting the ashes of his cremated relatives in small urns upon the various mantelpieces of his house, and who was only stayed in his impetuous course by a friend who was spending the night with him, and who, finding what he took to be an artistic box of tooth-powder in his room, forthwith proceeded to make use of it in the customary way. The collector was horrified when, in the middle of a late breakfast, his daughter burst into the room with the news, "Oh, father, Mr. Blank has been cleaning his teeth with auntie!"

A LUM HAT

CLOTHES are controlled by two tyrants—climate and fashion; and one would be hard put to it to say which is the more insistent. Among the Eskimos a robe of buffalo would not be too much; at the Equator the grasshopper would be a burden. It is certain that fashion sits in the seat of the mighty. Such unromantic things as comfort and convenience, prudence and health, give way before human vanity. A singular instance of this came to my notice many years ago. I was listening to a well-known missionary from the Congo describing in the most graphic and amusing terms his first arrival on the coast of Africa. Among other startling experiences, he told us of the first glimpse he ever had of a real African native, an immense man of jet-black complexion, who came off-shore in a small boat to meet him attired in “a top hat and nothing”! The African, with his childish love of novelty and display, had somehow got hold of this bit of property belonging to some other European, desirous of being in the fashion of the civilized world as far as head-gear was concerned at least, and doubtless felt himself invested with new dignity in this remarkable but scanty wardrobe. One could not help wishing that the cinematograph had been to the fore in those days.

A Lum Hat

It is easy to understand why a savage should appreciate a lum hat, for a more barbarous object never occurred to the most riotous imagination. For ugliness and discomfort it would be hard to beat. Yet this is the chosen head-gear of an enlightened civilization, and is frankly declared by the fashionable to be the hall-mark of a gentleman. Custom is indeed a tyrant, or no sane man would wish to be a gentleman at such a price. Why is it, I wonder, that there is such a lamentable lack of the picturesque about the masculine attire of the present day? It must have been good fun to live in the days of powdered wigs and cocked hats, of lace and ruffles, of knee-breeches, silk stockings, and buckled shoes. But now, alas! the twentieth century is the most unpicturesque of centuries. We have such a dull climate, leaden-clouded and fog-bound, and we have invented a costume to match it. Something by way of contrast would be more to the point. A dash of colour would be acceptable. If we cannot have much blue in the sky, why not have it in the pantaloons? We profess to admire Nature; we go into raptures over a sunset; we write poems about the trees and the flowers; yet we do not take a leaf out of Nature's book and clothe ourselves in spring radiance, in summer verdure, or in autumn gold. No; as far as clothing is concerned, "every prospect pleases, and only man is vile!"

I once sat on a lum hat in a church. It was not my own idea. I was egged on to it by my brother

A Lum Hat

and a mischievous cousin. They had spied it on the seat of an empty pew after the congregation had "sailed," where it was awaiting the return of its owner, who was having an interview with the minister in the vestry. The temptation for these two ruffians was great, but their zeal for mischief lacked performance, and so I was made the scapegoat. I was for demurring, for it did not appeal to me as seemly to sit upon a hat, especially in church. But they dared me to do it, and that settled it. I could never bear to have it said that I was afraid to do a thing. I entered the pew, and in a second the hat was a concertina. I remember the sensation of it to this day—the sinking sensation of the hat, coupled with a sinking sensation in my heart when the deed was done; the ominous crackling sound, as the stiff fabric buckled under my weight; the appearance of utter ruin and collapse in the empty pew when I rose to survey my "handiwork"; the guffaws of the other two conspirators, and their alarming predictions of what would be my fate when the wrecked "tile" was discovered; the sudden stampede of the three of us in panic terror as we heard footsteps approaching :

"It haunts me still, though many a year has fled,
Like some wild melody!"

I remember another scene in which a lum hat figured in never-to-be-forgotten fashion. It was at Kennington Oval, at the end of that immortal match between England and Australia, when the Australians

A Lum Hat

won by seven runs. Twenty-five thousand people were hanging on every ball that was bowled, strung up to the most feverish pitch of excitement. Everyone thought that England would save the game. Only eighty-five runs were needed, with eleven of the best men in England to get them. But F. R. Spofforth was bowling his deadliest, a blue funk set in, and wicket after wicket fell. W. G. Grace was the only man who kept his head, and batted away steadily while seeing man after man away to the pavilion. C. T. Studd, the great Cambridge captain, and one of the most brilliant batsmen of the day, was in such a tremor of nerves that he implored W. G. to let him go in late in the innings, and his request was granted, but with no effect. The last man came in ; the great crowd began encroaching on the ground, ready for a final rush to the front of the pavilion ; C. W. Beale, the Australians' manager, with a brand-new lum hat on his head, was on his feet by the pavilion rails, ready on the instant to rush to the telegraph office to send off a cable to the Antipodes. In the tense silence you could have almost heard the proverbial pin drop. The last man was bowled ; a mighty shout rent the air. C. W. Beale, in a kind of frenzy, seized his shiny top hat, whirled it thrice round his head, and then flung it into the air, and in a moment it was a shapeless pulp beneath the trampling feet of the cheering mob. It was a great game and a great finish. England wanted but eighty-five runs, and actually made fifty-one for the loss of only one wicket ; yet in the end they lost by

A Lum Hat

seven runs, and dear old W. G. had scored thirty-two out of the entire total.

The only thing I would really like a lum hat for would be to get things out of it like a conjurer. If I only had the uncanny powers of David Devant, a lum hat would be a gold-mine, or at least a rabbit-warren. I have seen him pound up a borrowed watch in a lum hat and bring a plum-pudding out of it instead. I have seen him put two or three coloured handkerchiefs into it, and produce a Union Jack apparently made out of them. I have seen him get ribbons and pigeons and money and wine and milk out of it, as if it were a kind of universal supply stores. That would really be something like a hat to have. But it must cost a great deal, and I don't think I would ever dare to wear it. I would keep it under a glass case or in a burglar-proof safe, and approach it with that reverence which is due to magical powers and properties.

I have of late been present at the untimely demise of a lum hat, and I never attended any obsequies with a more indecent joy. It had still some wear in it, but Priscilla had either read an article in *Home Chat* or seen an advertisement in the *Ladies' Pictorial* giving hints on how to make all sorts of odds and ends out of the skin of a lum hat, and from that moment my property was doomed. Priscilla is fond of novelty and likes to make experiments. She did not so much demand my hat as quietly confiscate it. But I did not care, for I attribute many a headache to its weight, and I can trace my incipient baldness to its

A Lum Hat

total immunity from ventilation; moreover, I was interested in the skinning process, and had some suppressed curiosity to see whether those *Home Chat* suggestions were really to be trusted. I must say that Priscilla did the ruthless deed in a highly skillful manner. A sharp penknife, an accurate eye, and a deft hand worked a really remarkable transformation. It would have made any taxidermist green with envy to see the way in which she found the invisible seam, and inserted the point of the penknife dexterously into the stitches, ripping them up, and then seizing an end of the glossy skin and peeling it off as if it were the skin of an orange. The operation was entirely successful, and the patient, denuded of his covering, presented a brown and blotchy appearance, as if he had spent a few indiscreet and hilarious months in a tropical climate. A lum hat without its skin is a forlorn object, and when worn upon the head at a rakish angle gives the wearer the appearance of Dick Swiveller or a Christy Minstrel of dubious character and low antecedents. As for the skin, it can be made into almost anything—a bag, a purse, a waistcoat, a doll's dress, a bit of trimming, a neck-tie—according to the taste and fancy and skill of the manipulator.

The appropriateness of the title, "A Lum Hat," is beautifully demonstrated in *Peter Pan* during the building of the Wendy House. The tiny house is built beneath the trees, and Wendy and the Lost Boys crowd into it, and the crowning touch of realism is given by the addition of a tile hat on the roof to

A Lum Hat

perform the functions of a chimney, through which real smoke curls up into the still air of the forest. And the spectator is satisfied that all will be well and snug with the inmates when they see Peter himself keeping guard at the door and doing sentry duty with a harlequin's lath for a sword.

THRENODY

“Just when we’re safest, there’s a sunset touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, someone’s death. . . .”

ROBERT BROWNING.

How often it happens that the even tenor of our way is broken up by some sudden and unexpected event! A fresh turn is given to our thoughts; a new element is introduced into our experience. A letter arrives, a telegram comes, and the whole aspect of things is changed. There is no secure hour; the heart lies ever open to the arrows of vicissitude; there is always some vulnerable spot, and no armour forged in human furnace avails to protect it. One such morning came to me years ago—a fair day in June—and news arrived that turned its glory into gloom, and I could no longer see the face of the sun. Another day came a few years later, a day in the very zenith of spring, and while writing at my desk the telegram fell out of the blue that made my heart stand still, and for the moment froze all feeling at its source. The cedar had fallen, the rock was removed from its place, and the landscape has never since been the same.

I lost an old comrade lately. We had not seen each other for long, but his going has left a blank. Another link with the past has been broken, and a chord of memory has been set a-sounding in my

Threnody

heart, musing fondly upon days that are gone.
The poignant lines of Lamb have been with me:

“I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.”

And, like Lamb, I have been “pacing round the haunts of my childhood.”

The days I spent at Milford House were among the happiest I have ever known. My father and mother had gone on a prolonged visit to America and Canada, and I was transferred to Milford House till their return. For a year I trudged to school up the length of Stow Hill, took my share of *Sturm und Drang* among a few score of boys, learned many things I was not taught, and along with my cousin struggled with the rudiments of scholarship under the vigilant tutelage of Dominie Green. We were like the lads of whom the poet sings so blithely :

“And three fair summers did we twain
Live, as they say, and love together,
And bore by turns the wholesome cane,
Till our young skins became as leather.
We carved our names on every desk,
And tore our clothes, and inked our collars,
And looked unique and picturesque,
But not, it may be, model scholars.
We did much as we chose to do :
We'd never heard of Mrs. Grundy ;
All the theology we knew
Was that we mightn't play on Sunday.
And all the general truths : that cakes
Were to be bought at four a penny,
And that excruciating aches
Resulted if we ate too many.”

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Those were halcyon days. The chief bliss of the situation was that Milford House was a girls' school, and after a day at Mr. Green's among those hordes of incipient savages it was like coming into a quiet haven to come back home to Milford House. I was but eight years old, and my cousin was eleven, neither of them ages that could appreciate the full piquancy of the situation; but some of the girls were not much older, and we had our hilarious times. There were several boarders and two or three resident governesses, and the introduction of two inquisitive boys into this cloistral community created a ripple of excitement very pleasant to all parties.

The house was a large one; indeed, it was two houses rolled into one, the connecting link being a passage through a red baize door, which I regarded oftentimes with palpitating bosom. One of the delights of the week was when my aunt, who presided over the school, would read one of Scott's novels to the girls as they sat at their evening sewing. I was permitted to come to these mental diversions, and on my first appearance on the other side of the red baize door there was a pleasing flutter of interest and bashfulness on all hands. My aunt's reading of *Quentin Durward* proceeded to an accompaniment of shy smiles, and sidelong glances, and suppressed giggles, and blushes almost as crimson as the baize door itself. But relations were less strained as time went on. An evening a week was appointed for dancing and charades, and we had great times, which culminated in the loss of my

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heart, not to one of the boarders, but to one of the governesses !

“ She was approaching thirty-two,
And I was then eleven—nearly !”

Only eight, as a matter of fact ; but even then—

“ I did not love as others do,
None ever did that I've heard tell of ;
My passion was a byword through
The town she was, of course, the belle of.”

The kindest act she ever performed for me was the extraction of a tooth, when I was half-mad with pain, by the ingenious expedient of tying a bit of cotton round the tooth and the other end of the cotton to the handle of the door, and suddenly slamming the door when the patient wasn't looking. It was a drastic method, but most efficacious, and I had the felicity of beholding my refractory incisor dangling at the end of the cotton, while my fair benefactress, pillowing my head upon her breast, staunched the bleeding gap with a cambric handkerchief.

My cousin and I had two boon companions (boys of course) with whom we made scores of excursions in the surrounding country. We simply scoured the land ; we knew the neighbourhood like a map. Some of those excursions will live with me for ever. They are a veritable part of me. We went to all the ruined castles and abbeys round about—and Monmouthshire is rich in ruins ; we visited Raglan, Chepstow, Usk, Caerphilly, Caerleon, Abergavenny, Crumlin, Tintern, the Wynd Cliff, Cardiff ; we climbed the heathery heights of Twm Barlwm, ate

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sandwiches at the Reservoir, tramped the valley of the Wye, and gathered primroses in the woods. There were wonderful woods within a few miles of Newport, and many a spring morning found us setting off with our baskets and a goodly supply of provender to spend the day among the primroses. I see them often in my day-dreams, those woods in spring; we four lads made them ring with shouts of happy laughter. Never were skies so blue, or trees so fresh and green, or birds so full of glee; never were such carpets of moss or such profusion of primroses; never were boys more frolicsome with the joy of youth. I had my first sight of a cuckoo in flight in the woods of Caerleon; his twofold shout had sounded in our ears all day, and towards afternoon we saw him dart swift and silent, a short arrow-flight, from one tree to another.

The time came for me to go to boarding-school. It was at Maidenhead on the Thames, and it was my cousin's presence that made the days brighter and his protective kindness that healed my home-sick heart. We were thrown together constantly. He was older by three years than I, and consequently we were not in the same classes; but we played cricket together, we were in the football team, we ran in the sports, we went long rambles, we shared our parcels and hampers from home, we collected stamps, butterflies, birds' eggs, and coins, we slept in the same dormitory. Sometimes my spirits were so low that the tears were not far away. This was during my first term, and in the first days of the term; the symptoms

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grew easier later on. These depths of despair were usually reached at night, and it was then my cousin proved himself a friend indeed. He knew screeds of poetry—Longfellow at that time was his passion ; and at night, when the lights were out and the head-master's footsteps had descended the stairs, I would creep for comfort into my cousin's bed, and for an hour he would regale me with *King Robert of Sicily*, *The Legend Beautiful*, and long extracts from *Hiawatha*. I am carried back over the intervening time, and I hear his voice sounding in the darkness, and I would fall asleep with the words chiming faintly in my drowsy ears :

“ And the convent bell appalling
From its belfry calling, calling,
Rang through court and corridor.

* * * *

‘ Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled !
That is what the vision said.”

These things are not much to record, but they meant much at the time, and they are not things one easily forgets. These poems of Longfellow have always had an added sweetness for me, the pleasure of happy association ; they “ sound faint and mellow now, behind the hills of death.” My cousin's ways and mine parted in later years, but the glamour of that early time will never wholly fade, and the days we spent in boyhood down in Monmouthshire will always have the shine of morning over them, and all the blithe and dewy freshness of woods in spring.

UMBRELLAS

CLIMATE is responsible for many vagaries of human nature, and among them is this inconsequent essay. We have had such a visitation of weeping clouds of late, and have spent so much of our time tilting against squalls, as R.L.S. would say, that we have had to summon all our weapons of defence, and overcoats, mackintoshes, oilskins, and umbrellas have had a long innings. It is wonderful how we manage to endure this climate of ours. Its versatility is so astounding. You put on a winter vest, and the sun comes out and the south wind blows gently, and you are deceived into thinking that summer has come again. You go home perspiring and rather annoyed at being so deceived, and you take off your winter vest and put on a more diaphanous garment, and at once the weathercock gives a leer and a lurch and veers round to north-east, and a breeze like a carving-knife cuts into your marrow, and sleet comes rattling out of grey masses of cloud, and you visit the chemist for formalin and Sanatogen and anti-influenza tablets and quinine, and go home to shiver over the fire and make cynical remarks about the weather.

But about those umbrellas. I wonder how it is that there is such an element of the grotesque in our protective coverings? Perhaps it is because we are

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essentially grotesque animals, and have a genius for what is bizarre and queer and strange. It would be difficult to conceive of a more grotesque article than an umbrella, or a more ridiculous garment than a pair of trousers, or a more fantastic covering than a tile hat. Over the garments of the fairer half of the world it is best to preserve a discreet silence. I knew a Colonel once whose wife took in the *Queen* and the *Ladies' Pictorial* and other picturesque periodicals pertaining to the fashions, and when he smoked his pipe at night he would casually take up one of these feminine papers and pretend to be immersed in the serial story. But it was the advertisements that excited him, and his scandalized spouse, on making the discovery, thought it wise to remove the cause of his extravagant interest and put him on a strictly sober diet of Mrs. Humphry Ward. Even the great daily papers are not without these pages of frills and furbelows now, and it would seem that the difference between ourselves and the South Sea Islander is infinitesimal after all. A string of beads is an excellent costume in its way, and very much cheaper than a full suit of tweeds. It is all a matter of climate, not of civilization at all. Clothes are primarily the trappings of guilt, according to a very venerable document, and I do not see why we should be ashamed of nudity when we reflect that our first parents began the world "with nothing more than a skin apiece and a rude knowledge of gardening."

But this paper is about umbrellas. I remember being at Kennington Oval one very wet day. There

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was a great cricket match on, and the patient British public waited and waited and waited on the circling tiers around the shaven turf. Clouds came and went; the sun, playing hide-and-seek among them, looked out coyly from time to time; and just as hope was beginning to be rekindled in ten thousand bosoms, he vanished abruptly behind a bank of inky blackness, and the rain fell more pitilessly than ever. The players wandered about disconsolately in the pavilion, or smoked their pipes on the seats overlooking the arena of strife; and in order to prevent hope from dying altogether, the umpires, in their long white robes, periodically made an official inspection of the pitch. They performed this solemn rite as if the destiny of a nation depended upon their decision, poking and pressing the ground here and there with the toes of their boots, then removing a superfluous blade or two of grass from the sacred twenty-two yards, then gazing intently at the clouds and around the horizon, then approaching each other with grave deliberation and holding an apparently interminable consultation, while ten thousand pairs of eyes were riveted upon their forms. "To be or not to be—that is the question." The arbiters of fate nod their heads and point to the ground, and a faint cheer rises from the depressed spectators; then they shake their heads and look at the clouds, and finally, after profound reflection, they proceed to march slowly back to the pavilion. A groan rolls round the ground, and an aggressive spirit shouts "Play," and his temerity communicates itself to a

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multitude, and immediately a strident chorus of "Play! play! play!" goes up to the indifferent heavens. The umpires are obdurate, and gloom settles down upon the benches once more as the rain continues to fall. It is now that the vast cricket ground presents its most remarkable appearance. Every man has hoisted his umbrella and receded from view beneath it, and the Oval looks as though it were growing a few thousand black mushrooms of varying quality.

I am told that the umbrella is of great antiquity. I can quite believe it. My own most certainly is. A friendly cyclopædia informs me that the umbrella existed in China in the eleventh century B.C. I don't think mine is quite so old as that, but it must be very near it. Sculptures have been found at Nineveh and Thebes "featuring" the umbrella. One can draw a pleasing picture in one's imagination of the Queen of Sheba going to pay her memorable visit to King Solomon, that she might see all his wealth, and incidentally that she might be seen herself, beneath an umbrella of gorgeous hues like a complicated sunset. Of course, she would not carry it herself; that would be *infra dig.* and render her liable to unfriendly comment from jealous and vinegary dames of high degree. But it would be carried for her, held aloft, perhaps, by some dusky son of the desert with a skin like polished ebony and a countenance impassive as a Sphinx. That is how I should like to deal with my umbrella—by proxy. It is such an inconvenient thing to carry, and one

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would rather see someone else struggling with it than become involved in it one's self. I have never quite got over a prolonged bout I once had with an umbrella in a storm of wind and rain in a Midland city. I had just got the thing up after a superhuman effort, and all my canvas was spread, so to speak, and I was sailing along with all the dignity of full top-gallants, when suddenly came a horrid swoop of wind that seized my hat and hurled it vindictively into the middle of the street, and then cast itself with such violence upon my straining umbrella that the mast broke (I must keep up the nautical illusion, having once begun it) and the mainstays cracked, and the canvas was blown billowing inside out, and after being engaged for upwards of a quarter of an hour in a fierce but ineffectual struggle with Nature in one of her worst tantrums, I abandoned all my gear, threw up the sponge (I fear the nautical is here merging into the pugilistic), and gave myself to the elements. The elements took charge of my umbrella, anyhow, and I saw its ribs exposed and its sides stove in, and the whole vessel cast a hopeless wreck upon inhospitable shores. It was an epic controversy, and it has left its mark.

I think the man who first carried an umbrella in the streets of London deserves a medal. Heroism is not always rewarded. I believe his name was Jonas Hanway, and his feat was acclaimed by crowds of wondering and jeering spectators. But Jonas Hanway held on his way undaunted, and now an umbrella is one of the commonest objects of the streets. Origin-

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ally the umbrella was purely and simply for protection from the sun and rain, but in the East—that place of many mysteries—it has often been regarded as an emblem of rank. This gives rise to interesting speculations. Supposing I were to indulge in that quaint conceit of Charles Lamb, and to imagine myself receiving successively a number of titles. “I have made a little scale (writes Lamb), supposing myself to receive the following accessions of dignity from the King, who is the fountain of honour. As at first, 1, Mr. C. Lamb; 2, C. Lamb, Esq.; 3, Sir C. Lamb, Bart.; 4, Baron Lamb; 5, Viscount Lamb; 6, Earl Lamb; 7, Marquis Lamb; 8, Duke Lamb. It would look like quibbling to carry it on further . . . otherwise I have sometimes in my dreams imagined myself still advancing, as 9th, King Lamb; 10th, Emperor Lamb; 11th, Pope Innocent, higher than which is nothing.” Fancy having an umbrella made to suit each of these! At first an ordinary cotton gingham; then a decent alpaca; then a soft silk; then a delicate shade of blue; then a subdued purple; then a deep red; then a canary yellow; then a pale green; and on arriving at Kingship I would have cloth of gold; and at Emperorhood, all the colours of the rainbow; and at Popedom, a canopy like driven snow. To see them all in the umbrella-stand at once—were such a miracle feasible—would give a man all the symptoms of an apotheosis.

I think the one great classical passage of literature on the subject of umbrellas is that relating to the

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property of Mrs. Gamp. I have left myself no time to tell of how umbrellas go astray like lost sheep ; of how they are lent and never returned ; of how they are surreptitiously exchanged ; of how a superfine specimen was given to me once, and was left on its very first outing on the top of an Edinburgh tram-car and seen no more ; of how an eminent physician walks the streets of Glasgow with a map of the solar system on the inside of his umbrella, so that he is almost moon-struck, or at least is given to stargazing, when he unfurls its sidereal beauties. But here is the classic reference in *Martin Chuzzlewit* :

“ Mrs. Gamp had a large bundle with her, a pair of pattens, and a species of gig umbrella ; the latter article in colour like a faded leaf, except where a circular patch of a lively blue had been dexterously let in at the top.” And again, in the immortal description of Mrs. Gamp’s varied belongings, as discovered in her room in Kingsgate Street, Holborn, set forth in chapter xlix. : “ A pair of bellows, a pair of pattens, a toasting-fork, a kettle, a pap-boat, a spoon for the administration of medicine to the refractory, and lastly, Mrs. Gamp’s umbrella, which, as something of great price and rarity, was displayed with particular ostentation, completed the decorations of the chimney-piece and adjacent wall.”

Other references may be found by the diligent searcher of the Dickens scriptures, but these will suffice. A gamp ! Do we not all know the term, and the venerable and capacious and inflated article it describes ? Is there any other writer, I wonder,

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who, by intimate association with an immortal character, has thus labelled an article of universal use and interest for all time? And who could have done it with a defter hand? That touch about the "circular patch of lively blue let in at the top" and the similitude of the faded leaf are things that rise in the mind at odd and unexpected moments, shedding a momentary ray of light upon a rather drab and often depressing world.

AMBITIONS

AMBITION is one of the earliest and permanent characteristics of human nature. Some of our greatest literature has accustomed us to regard it as a dangerous thing. Shakespeare has put into the mouth of Wolsey the memorable words:

“I charge thee, Cromwell, fling away ambition :
By that sin fell the angels.”

In his great tragedy of *Macbeth* he has allowed us to see its devastating effect upon an otherwise noble character, and how a vaulting ambition that o'er-leaps itself ends in uttermost disaster. Milton has described the same thing with wonderful power in his *Paradise Lost*. Our greatest writers seem to have taken pains to show us the worst side of it.

But it has another side to it. I once asked a boy of five what he wished to be when he grew up. With the utmost promptitude he replied, “I’m goin’ to be a great-grandfather!” Verily, the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts. It was in vain I protested that to be a great-grandfather, though a highly respectable calling, was scarcely a lucrative employment. The urchin had for the time being made up his small mind, and appeared much surprised and not a little indignant at any serious objection being made. It seemed to him a pleasant

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and dignified vocation, calculated doubtless to bring honour to the family if not grist to the mill.

This business of anticipating a career usually begins early. Between the ages of four and sixteen the changes are rung on most of the existing forms of livelihood. The youthful mind dwells longingly upon all the possibilities of manhood. The vivid imagination of the boy looks ahead through the long avenue of the years, until there seems absolutely no limit to the imposing vista. Capacity and fitness for a particular line of business do not occur to the soaring ambition of a youngster not even in his teens. The mere fact of his having attained the dignity of his first knickerbockers appears to invest him with all the attributes of genius. He merely consults his own wishes, and his fortune is made. He is fully prepared to leap into eminence at a moment's notice, and to dazzle an astonished and applauding world with the brilliance and multiplicity of his attainments.

To an elder—a parent, for instance—the ambitions of the child do not always appear in such a rosy light. But elders are extremely prosaic and uninteresting persons, and parents in particular are notoriously lacking in imagination. I never received the slightest encouragement from my parents when I expressed an ardent desire to be a clown. A visit to Hengler's at the age of seven had convinced me that my destiny lay there. I had seen a clown at that incomparable circus of the name of Sandy, whose chief exploit was to lie on his back in the centre of the ring pretending

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to be asleep; and when the ring-master wasn't looking he would raise his head and call out, "Spooney!" and at once lie motionless as before. This irresistible specimen of humour so charmed me that my decision was made. I communicated my wish to my parents, but they were obdurate; and a suggestion that it would do me more good to be sent to boarding-school simply sickened me. Parents can never be made to understand. Ministers often preach on the text, "Children, obey your parents," which is all very well from their point of view; but if I were a parson I would preach from the other part of the same text, which is usually quite ignored, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath."

My disappointment about the clown business did not last. The world in those days came upon me in a succession of surprises, and my ambitions changed with the rapidity of a kaleidoscope. I was taken on a journey, and I must at once be a railway guard. The chief attraction here was to wave red and green flags and blow a whistle with a pea in it, and receive plenty of tips, and swing myself miraculously into the train into a compartment all my own while it was gliding rapidly from the platform. Some time later an indulgent uncle took me to the pantomime, where some acrobats led me afterwards to spend several days attempting incredible contortions on the hearth-rug. I heard a famous preacher, and for weeks thereafter I discoursed volubly every Sunday afternoon from an improvised pulpit in an arm-chair to an intelligent congregation of sofa-cushions and

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antimacassars, with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as my Bible. I watched a very clever French artist painting wonderful landscapes and seascapes in North Devon, and I saw myself hanging on the line in the Royal Academy. If the little Frenchman had not put on most of his colours with a knife, spreading and distributing them about the canvas like butter in magnificent blotches, I doubt if I should have been so much impressed. Then at twelve I saw Barry Sullivan play Hamlet, and in the summer of the same year I went to see the Australians play cricket, and for five solid years I hovered between the stage and the turf as the arena for my future energies.

It was all very delightful. I often wish I could go back to the days when life was such a waking dream. I have sometimes wondered how many of us occupy the places for which we are really fitted. It is seldom enough that our destiny is clearly defined from the first. Those who have a true "call," which I take to be an exceptional bias toward some particular career, together with an outstanding capacity for it, are much to be envied. Many of us are pitch-forked into work for which we have no liking and little fitness, and accept the situation with what grace we can muster. The cruel necessity of making a living strikes a chill into our hearts, and our cherished ambitions are frozen at their source. It is for few men indeed that circumstances enter into kindly conspiracy. Yet how soon we learn to accept our own limitations and mediocrity! We can do no other. We may sometimes think we would like to

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exchange places with somebody else—with some man, perhaps, whose work is prominent, and whose personality is seen in the strong glare of publicity—but a saner mood makes us more contented with our lot. Publicity needs the hide of a rhinoceros. We do not know how often the poor wretch, who must make his appearance on the stage or on the platform or in the pulpit whether he is in the mood for it or not, longs to be out of it all at times, and to betake himself to “some boundless contiguity of shade.” The hermits and anchorites may have had mistaken notions in regard to their social obligations, but they certainly escaped an inordinate amount of worry and nervous apprehension. The regrettable circumstance about selecting a career is that in our passage through this extraordinary world we are not permitted the luxury of a trial trip. There is no “measured mile” along which we can try our paces. It would make such a difference to our career. As it is, we have to learn everything as we go. The most difficult crises of life, its most momentous choices, its severest temptations, confront us at a time when we have least strength and wisdom and experience with which to meet them. It would seem as if we had to learn by playing a losing game, to gain wisdom by our mistakes, to deepen and enrich our experience by travelling a *via dolorosa*. A trial trip would obviate all this. We should know our weak points. We should know the difference between the important and the unimportant, the essential and the non-essential. We should know where the lion roams in

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the path and where the snake lurks in the grass. We should have a map of the country in our minds, and understand the best routes, and pay in a genteel fashion as we go. But we have to pay so heavily for all our gains that we are nearly bankrupt at the start. Life takes us by the throat, and bids us stand and deliver. After a succession of these highway robberies we feel inclined to abandon the enterprise and to change our views of Providence.

A little judicious counsel and encouragement, tactfully administered during the difficult years from fourteen to twenty, would go far to render our entrance upon the stage of life less tentative and awkward. We need not be in such a hurry to leave the friendly shelter of home. That characteristic longing of the boy to become a man, that inordinate pride in leaving school, is one of the most pathetic of illusions. The too early assumption of manhood is a tragi-comedy. It is hard to believe that some men have ever been children. It is equally hard to believe that some men will ever be anything else. To be a boy at fifty is to have kept one's soul alive; to be one at seventy is to make immortality tangible and a state to be desired. At the age of twenty-two I found myself in such a position of responsibility that I tremble as I think of it and stand aghast at my own temerity. Or was it insensibility, or complacency? Who shall say? In any case, I hold to the necessity of tactful encouragement, given naturally and honestly out of personal experience, during those early years, as a religious duty on the

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part of the elders of the race. If that boy of five should ever arrive at what some humorist calls "years of discretion," and still desires to be a great-grandfather, I would certainly contrive to see that no obstacle is put in his way.

THE SAFETY VALVE

AN ancient writer, in one of the most wonderful books in the world, putting his words into the mouth of the chief character in his dramatic poem, says, "I will speak in the bitterness of my soul." No man should ever do that, if he can help it. It is natural and human to do it, but it is unwise. He will say things that he will regret in his cooler moments. He will lay himself open to grave misunderstandings with persons who stand outside the circle of his experience, and who are therefore unable to enter into his secret. It is impossible for a man to be just when he is bitter. A man cannot see things in their right proportion, relation, or perspective when he is in a state of anguish. Bitterness of soul is an abnormal condition, and the whole world assumes the bilious colour of that reckless and distorted mood. It is like looking at things through a bad pane of glass. Everything has a strange twist ; straight lines become waves ; the upright wall is out of plumb. When a man talks of life bitterly and recklessly out of black humour, he describes things as they look to him, not as they look to people generally. His own immediate experience has created a particular kind of world for him, and he forgets that it is not the whole world ; nor does he remember at the moment that he once saw it quite

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differently, and that in all probability he will see it quite differently again. An abnormal state of soul is not the best mood for propounding a philosophy.

But sometimes a man cannot help speaking in the bitterness of his soul, and then we must expect to hear all sorts of wild and whirling words. We shall hear some strange comments on life, tremendous indictments of men and things, passionate criticism of the universe, perhaps even an audacious arraignment of God. The man is pent up, full of seething rebellion, brooding over a host of invading thoughts, and he must find some outlet, some safety valve, or lose his wits. There must be some way to—

“ Cleanse the stuffed bosom of the perilous stuff
That weighs upon the heart ”;

and there are occasions when we find it in speech, and we utter ourselves in bitterness of soul. It may be the only way to get rid of the poison in the blood. If a man elects to speak in the bitterness of his soul, he should do it thoroughly and get it over, so that he may the more quickly return to sanity. The crust of conventionality sometimes breaks, and through the gaping fissure we catch a startling glimpse of subterranean fires. There are circumstances and experiences when self-repression may be carried too far. Something may happen when to keep silence would almost kill us. Better to speak even in bitterness of soul than to have that bitterness turned in upon ourselves, eating up our own vitals. Better to speak than to bottle up the

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poisonous matter and brood over it, and allow it to infect the whole system, beclouding the judgment, distorting the imagination, colouring the whole outlook upon life, disturbing our relations with our fellow-men. The thunder must have its roll. When the storm is over, we shall feel as if we had dropped a burden and left it behind, and the whole experience will be looked back upon as we look back upon some hideous dream.

We must find room in the records of human experience for these occasional outbursts of intense feeling, and in many cases all we can do is to stand aside in sympathy and awe until the tempest is overpast. Nature finds room for these occasional outbreaks. She has her volcanoes, her geysers, her cyclones, her strange and violent upheavals; the fire or the water forces its way through the solid rock, and after the eruption she settles down again to a period of quiet work and happy repose, as if glad to be rid of that internal disturbing element.

It is not without significance and suggestion that the Book of Job, perhaps the most wonderful poem ever written, should have a central place within the covers of the Bible, and that it should set forth in arresting imagery, in daring apostrophe, in passionate eloquence, in startling self-disclosure, some of the profoundest problems, some of the most unanswerable questions, some of the deep mysteries of life. The Bible is not afraid of these tremendous experiences—experiences which are almost explosions—and does not hesitate to record all man's comments

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upon them, even when they call in question the very character of God. If I were called upon to choose among the books of the Bible, I think the Psalms and Job would be among the first I would choose and the last I would let go. They are so intensely human, sounding the whole gamut of experience from its lowest note to the top of its compass. If we only realized how intensely human the Bible is and how marvellously modern it is, we should never again regard it as a remote and unattractive book. There is a great human experience underlying it all, reflected everywhere in its pages, and we must make an effort to recover its humanity, to help men to feel that the men who wrote the various books were "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, men who knew perplexity and sorrow, and were well acquainted with our doubts and fears and grief." It has been truly said that if the Bible command itself in the end as in some real sense the Word of God, it comes to us in the beginning no less surely as the word of man or words of men, words which throb with human emotion and enshrine the greatest interpretation of human life.

If a man should ever elect to speak in the bitterness of his soul, he should choose his company for the outburst. Job did it in the presence of his familiar friends. How wise that was! A man cannot reveal his real self in promiscuous company. The world is a censorious place, and the man who always says what comes first has an uneasy time of it. All unconsciously he makes many enemies. He

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is always being misunderstood by people who have no sense of humour (and they are a great multitude) and maligned by folk who have no breadth of vision, no bigness of heart, no mental hospitality.

Even Job's friends misunderstood him, and we can hardly wonder at it. The man in his profound misery was so different from the man they had known in his happiness and prosperity, and they could not grasp the significance of the change. The wisest thing they did when they saw his condition was to sit down in silence with him for seven days. It was partly the silence of amazement, partly of sympathy, partly perhaps of awkwardness. Yet their sympathy was not deep or comprehensive enough to prevent them trying to comfort the sufferer with their orthodoxy, and upbraiding him from the narrow standpoint of an experience which had never been battered with the shocks of doom. Their creed had never been assailed like that of their friend. Their views of life had never been cracked from top to bottom like his, as though the very foundations of the world had been moved. Still, these men, I think, have received less than their due. We may deplore their limitations, but within those limitations they did their best. To call a man a "Job's comforter" has become a term of reproach, but these men have not deserved all the scorn and opprobrium that have been poured upon them. They should have credit for their sympathetic feelings and intention, even though the expression of it left something to be desired. They were still

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Job's friends, and I have no doubt that the spectacle of such supreme misery would give them cause to overhaul their cherished maxims and to revise their limited and fatally fluent philosophy, as they realized that there were some experiences outside their ken, and for which they had no stereotyped cure on their list of orthodox prescriptions.

To come into close contact with the world's suffering ought certainly to extend the range of our sympathy and also to give us a larger creed. Orthodoxy of creed is one thing, but orthodoxy of heart is another and altogether nobler thing—warmer, richer, more expansive in every way. We may be shocked when we hear a man speak in the bitterness of his soul, and it may be good for us to be so shocked. It gives us another point of view. It enlarges our world. It affords us a startling and thought-provoking glimpse of the extraordinary complexity of life, of the strangeness and variety of human nature, of the depth below depth in the individual soul. If a man feels that he must let himself go, if he cannot help opening the safety valve, let him do it in congenial company, where the risk of misunderstanding is at least reduced to a minimum. The crowd will not appreciate his position. They will not make any effort to enter into the sanctuary of his woe. It is too much trouble, too disturbing and distressing. It is a mistake for a man to throw himself upon the sympathy of a crowd. There is a proper reticence to be observed in public about the deepest things, and a man violates that reticence at his own peril.

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We must try to be more human, and patient, and sympathetic with men who have been buffeted in the storm. There is nothing such a man dreads more than to be comforted (save the mark!) with conventional platitudes and pious commonplaces. There are so many trying and tremendous experiences—difficult moments of choice, desperate temptations, paralyzing circumstances, irreparable losses, desolating sorrows, unspeakable shames, all the endless variety of life's vicissitudes. In view of these things, it behoves us to cultivate the generous, hospitable mind and the warm, deep-feeling heart.

SYMPATHY WITH NATURE

AT this season of the year, with spring breaking all around us in a foam of green, we are reminded of the important part that Nature plays in our lives. Most of us feel a secret sympathy with Nature, but few can understand or express it. My excellent friend, "John o' London," without whose *Weekly* I should feel myself lost, remarks this week in an admirable article on Wordsworth:

"I imagine that there are few men and women of character who would not say that the most precious and memorable moments in their lives have been those in which they were alone with Nature, and in that mood of wise passiveness which Wordsworth teaches us to cultivate."

It is a coincidence that the same issue contains a letter headed, "The High Priests of Nature," suggesting that the perpetuation of the memory of a man like Richard Jefferies by a magazine or a society established in his name is just as worthy of support as the keeping green of the memory of Dickens by the *Dickensian* and the Dickens Society.

Some have this sympathy with Nature in pre-eminent degree. These are the poets and mystics, and in another order the scientists. They are the interpreters of Nature. But there are countless

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lovers of Nature who are in no sense interpreters, humble and simple hearts in whom the sense of wonder and worship is still alive, to whom messages of solace and invigoration come through the beauty of the earth and the glory of the skies, babes to whom revelations are made which are hidden from the prudent and the wise.

The seasons of the year are so silent and regular that we are apt to take small note of them. There is no bell to herald their approach and draw attention to their appeal. They are among the great common-places of experience. Only the few really watch the procession of the year. The farmer is bound to watch it, or his fields will suffer. He must plough his land at the right hour, and put in his seed at the proper time, and observe the stated ritual of the agricultural year. The poetic spirit watches it, because he cannot help it. Commonplace as it is in the sense of being familiar, he never ceases to wonder at it. To him spring is always new, and summer always a delight. Autumn and winter scatter their gold and silver over the earth, and the poet gathers it into the treasury of his heart. For the great unheeding, toiling multitude (with a few notable exceptions) Nature is for the most part little more than a background for life's busy drama, and while we are so deeply intent upon our buying and selling we have no time to lift up our eyes to the hills.

In spite of this, there are many people who have a feeling for Nature which they cannot altogether explain. A piece of fine music often awakens

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thoughts and stirs emotions which we cannot express in words, and Nature affects us in much the same fashion. Something holy, beautiful, wonderful, has passed our way, and we are the richer for the experience. Those in whom the child heart still survives are always impressed and moved by the beauty and the terror of the world. As a man grows richer in understanding, keener in sensibility, deeper in religious feeling, his susceptibility to the wonder and interest of the world will increase in power.

In former days, when superstition ruled man's mind and fear chilled the heart, he moved about the earth with a certain undefined dread. The powers of Nature seemed to him sometimes to be terrible powers, inimical and threatening, not kindly and beneficent; and he saw in the storm and the lightning, the whirlwind and the earthquake, the fire and the famine, the signs of a dread invisible power that must be constantly propitiated. But the truly spiritual man knows that Nature is his friend, and he knows how to make her his friend. We realize now that we are ourselves part of Nature. Nature is not a mere scenic background for our activities. She does not merely supply an appropriate setting for the various episodes in the drama of experience. Nature and man are not separated, but related. They have the same source, and the same life beats in both. There is, as Wordsworth saw, a pre-established harmony between them.

We cling to the earth when we thus begin to know her, to love her, to realize our kinship. I talked with

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an old woman who was dying. She was over eighty years of age. I said, "Well, you have had a good long spell, haven't you?" "Yes," she replied thoughtfully, "but I could do with more of it. You see, the earth's our mother, and we want our mother as long as we can." I thought there was a fine natural religion in that. It is not a pagan thought. That dear old soul was as sturdy a Christian as you could wish to meet, but, like a wise woman, she had brought the earth into her faith. She had lived in it more than eighty long years, but she was not tired of it. She wished for more of it. The earth was her mother.

This idea of sympathy with Nature is frequently emphasized in the writings of Hebrew poets and prophets. It finds most beautiful utterance in the Psalms. The writers of those inimitable poems seem to believe that all Nature is the friend of him who is the friend of God, and that there is an organic federacy in his favour. It is a favourite thought with Isaiah that Nature is somehow bound up with the destiny of mankind. He pictures a day when spiritual power will have such influence and ascendancy that the antipathies of Nature shall be reconciled, and even a child shall have control over the living creatures.

We ought to set great store by the men who are able by reason of their special gifts to interpret Nature for us. Still more should we value the men who teach us to use our own eyes. In one of his addresses to students Henry Drummond speaks of

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his first introduction to the works of John Ruskin, and gratefully acknowledges that it was Ruskin who taught him to see things for himself. From him he learned the power of observation. The great art critic showed him that we are all living in a world of beauty and wonder, and that the materials of pleasure and wisdom are close at hand. That Drummond learned his lesson well is amply shown in the books he afterwards wrote, and his wonderful little book, *Tropical Africa*, is sufficient testimony to his acute powers of observation.

Many of us would make our acknowledgments to men like Richard Jefferies, or to Thoreau, or to Emerson, or to George Borrow, or to Wordsworth. In some instances it amounts to an intellectual rebirth to make the acquaintance of such men. It had that effect on Mark Rutherford, as told in the *Autobiography*. Such minds show us what many never realized before, that Nature is not dead, but full of life and utterance and meaning. She has a message for us. She holds the secret of patience and serenity. She possesses a mysterious power of healing.

“Thou hadst, for weary feet, the gift of rest,” sings William Watson, referring to the poetical message of Wordsworth. That was because Wordsworth was made one with Nature. He communed with her and she with him. He entered into her secrets, invaded like a great high priest her innermost shrine; and she unveiled her loveliness to him,

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rewarding him with that precious gift of rest which he in turn bestowed upon a troubled world.

“ Love had he found in huts where poor men lie ;
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.”

Two things are essential for this sympathy with Nature—a quiet, receptive mind and a simple taste. Those who have brought to us the healing, the strength, the serenity of Nature have always been men somewhat apart from the strife and tumult of life—not uninfluenced, indeed, by the busy affairs of men and the stirring events of the world, but undisturbed and undistracted by them. They have received life’s deeper teachings in “a wise passiveness.” They have been men who have not suffered themselves to be dragged along at the heels of a bustling and bewildering civilization, but have lived aloof from the allurements of boisterous pleasures and fashion and sensation, undazzled by materialism, pursuing their way according to their own light in a sturdy independence; and they have their reward. There are some words of Emerson that come home to us in this connection :

“ That spirit which suffices quiet hearts, which seems to come forth to such from every dry knoll of sere grass, from every pine-stump and half-embedded stone, on which the dull March sun shines, comes forth to the poor and hungry, and to such as are of simple taste. If thou fill thy brain with Boston and New York, with fashion and covetousness, and wilt

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stimulate thy jaded senses with wine and French coffee, thou shalt find no radiance of wisdom in the lonely waste of the pine-woods."

It is a calamity when a man loses his sympathy with Nature, when his perception of her beauty and wonder grows dull, and when he is unable to take pleasure in such simple and wholesome delights as she affords. In a life of hurry and bustle, of business and distraction, of exhausting tasks and enervating pleasures, we need some steady, counteracting influence if we are to keep our minds serene and our hearts alive. Too often do we seek our pleasures in as noisy and heated an atmosphere as that in which our work is done, and many are not satisfied unless their recreation takes the form of some fresh excitement. We are bound to find time, to make opportunity, for quiet hours if we are to find real rest and reinforcement. A man cannot reinforce himself merely by changing the form of his excitement. Unless he has his quiet hours, his solitary musings, his times of thought and aspiration, he will never be a truly wise man or know the reality of spiritual things. The human heart is deeply wounded somewhere, and stands sorely in need of healing; and one of the best, surest, tenderest, and most skilful of all healers is our sweet old Mother Nature. That is a profoundly suggestive scripture written on the tombstone of a great naturalist, J. G. Wood: "Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee."

THOUGHTS IN BED

“ In the night, in the night,
When thou liest alone,
Ah, the sounds that are blown
In the freaks of the breeze,
By the spirit that sends
The voice of far friends
With the sigh of the seas,
In the night.”

WILLIAM WATSON.

THE poet evidently knew what it is to suffer from insomnia. He has lain awake, tossing from side to side, the victim of a restless mood, a troublesome conscience, an insistent thought, an irritable tongue, a vivid memory, an unsolved problem, a disturbing dream, a rasping pain, an excess of weariness, a looming apprehension, a fit of the fantods, an attack of fidgets, an unpleasant duty, an exciting interview, a carking care, a gnawing anxiety, a wearing grief, an undigested bit of cheese—any of the thousand-and-one imps that invade a man’s solitude to sit upon his pillow in the darkness, holding his eyes watching, and refusing to be dislodged.

Perhaps in the case of a poet it is the sore travail of a sonnet, a refractory line, an uncaptured phrase, an elusive word, a haunting cadence, the search for the right image, the pursuit of a metaphor, the remembrance of a false quantity, the torment of a

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misprint, the callousness of an editor, the stupidity of the critics, the neglect of the public, the groping for a title of a set of verses or a finished volume, the pangs of jealousy, the stress of emotion, a gust of inspiration, an idea for an ode, the giddiness of rapture, the fretfulness of despair. Anyhow, it kept him from sleeping.

Is there anything in the wide world more miserable than a sleepless night? It is the apotheosis of dejection. You try all the known dodges to induce drowsiness, and invent several new and original ones, all to no purpose. You count up to a hundred. You fix your eye on a stray moonbeam. You endeavour to make your mind a blank. You try to hypnotize yourself with the brass knob of the bed-post. You turn on the right side, then on the left side, then on your back. You gaze at the ceiling. You practise auto-suggestion on the most approved modern scientific principles, saying to yourself, slowly and emphatically and repeatedly: "I—am—very—sleepy. I—will—go—to—sleep. I—am—asleep. I—am—not—awake. There—is—no—such—thing—as—insomnia." And the more you say these things, the more thoroughly lively you become. A few more experiments occur to you. You raise one knee, then the other knee, then both knees at once, making an Alpine range across the bed. You stroke your eyelids. You think of running water, or any soothing sound. You try to remember how many verses there are in the 119th Psalm. You throw off the quilt. You go over all the names of

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the counties in England and Scotland and Wales. You hang an arm out of the bed. You repeat poetry. You make up absurd rhymes. You compose limericks. You recall consolatory things, such as the solar system. And at last you are all but dropping off when your whole bodily frame gives a tremendous muscular twitch, sudden and involuntary, and you are jumped broad staring awake again.

Then the horrors begin. You imagine all sorts of weird and uncanny things. You never knew you had such a vivid imagination before. Somebody is tickling the soles of your feet with a feather, and your hands are strapped to your sides. You are falling out of an aeroplane. You are tumbling over a precipice. You are lost in a fog. You are drowning in a loch. You have lost all your income. You have made some staggering remark in all good faith that has turned a sedate and pious assembly into stone. You have gone out into the street minus certain articles of attire generally deemed indispensable in polite society. You are walking on a tight-rope over an unfathomable abyss. You have suddenly gone as bald as an egg. You are dancing the cachucha in a church before a scandalized congregation. You are to make your maiden speech in the House of Commons, and have forgotten every word of it. You are walking arm-in-arm in a fashionable thoroughfare with a South Sea Islander imperfectly attired. You are being tried before the Lord Chief Justice on a criminal offence. You are in the presence of the Inquisition, with the prospect

Thoughts in Bed

of incredible tortures. So it goes on through the slow hours. These are only a few samples of the vagaries of which the mind is capable when prisoned in the dark.

But there is a happier side to this business of thoughts in bed, or we should be cut short in the bloom of our youth. I have had some really great notions in bed, ideas that would make my name famous throughout the world, if I could only carry them into effect, and if I could only remember them in the morning. I have sometimes thought of keeping a bedside note-book for the reception of midnight inspirations, ready for instant use when the flash comes. It is to contain suggestions for all manner of literary performances, the germs of works which would leave the twentieth century in no dubiety as to the persistence of genius in every age. But somehow the entries hitherto made have not proved satisfactory, and the scheme has long since been abandoned. Night thoughts never look so wonderful in the morning. When the idea came about 3 a.m., sailing into the mind as a new planet swims into our ken, it seemed as if some angel had whispered the thing into the ear, and the thought was set down in the note-book with a palpitating heart. But the light of morning is relentless, and the line of poetry that seemed like Shelley or Keats come to life again has had about as much genius in it as Mrs. Leo Hunter's *Ode to an Expiring Frog*. It is most disconcerting. I had a really good idea last night, though—an idea for a short story. It arrived quite

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suddenly out of the infinite inane at five minutes to four a.m. Greenwich time, and I lay awake for nearly an hour fitting the pieces of the tale together like a jig-saw puzzle. I am not going to give it away, but if you should come across a story called *The Fascinating Burglar* in *Chambers's Journal*, or some other high-toned periodical, you will know where it came from.

I once dreamed a course of lectures. The wonder of it is that they really came off. It was in a foreign city, and I was feeling very home-sick. The window of my room looked out on to a huddle of roofs and gables, moss-grown and yellowed with age, belonging to old-world houses, and my bed was so placed that I could see a whole vista of roofs stretching away into the moonlight. One night I lay gazing out through the wide-open window at the strange scene. The moonshine fell on leaning chimneys and twisted gables, making deep, grotesque shadows on the tiles. Lights in adjacent windows were extinguished one by one. An occasional nightcap was popped out from beneath a sloping roof, surmounting a head tightly screwed up with curl-papers ; the owner was surveying the night ere retiring finally to rest. Snatches of song from some belated reveller floated up now and then from the street below. Clocks from neighbouring steeples chimed the quarters in low, sweet tones. The shadows crept over the roofs as the moon sailed serenely through the sky. A cat would come twisting in and out among the close-packed chimneys, silently padding

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its way over the tiles, on some secret midnight expedition of its own—to keep a tryst, perhaps—maybe a feline Raffles making for the scene of some nefarious project. All the creakings and groanings of the ancient house in which I lay came to my ears. They were inaudible by day amid the stir and bustle of life, but in the silence of night they sounded like the creaking timbers of a ship labouring in heavy seas. What occult influence was at work that night I know not; but in the morning my project was fully formed, my course of lectures was mapped out, and I went straight after breakfast to my chief and told him of my plan. "Capital!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands with pleasure; "that's the very thing we want. Get to work on it right away!" "I'm glad you think well of the idea," I said; "I thought of it in bed last night." "Ah!" said the chief, "wonderful place, bed, for great ideas!"

If a bedside note-book is of dubious value, a bedside book-case is indispensable. I have had one hanging at my bedside almost since I can remember. To this day I have the one given me by my father over forty years ago; it is one of my treasures. It used to be filled with a boy's books—*The Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Coral Island*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Pickwick*, *Shakespeare*, and a score or so of others—and I was prouder of these volumes than of anything else I possessed. To-day the three shelves are tenanted by pocket volumes: a set of Dickens, a set of Hardy, another of Stanley Weyman, a fourth

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of Henry Seton Merriman. George Eliot is lodged in the middle shelf; George Meredith has apartments in the top one; a few oddments complete the series. R.L.S. is represented; a couple of Thackeray's novels; Penn's *Fruits of Solitude*; Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*; and a few books of American origin—Washington Irving, W. D. Howells, Frank R. Stockton, and Bret Harte. They might be better mixed, perhaps; but reading is a matter of taste, and my dear old book-case, which hung upon the wall beside me so long ago, when I deemed *The Coral Island* one of the masterpieces of literature, will serve my turn now that it holds the favourites of a later day.

BROADCASTING AND LISTENING

I MIGHT have done better to call this essay *The Woes of the Wireless*. My family life is practically shattered. We used to spend our evenings in talk and discussion and bridge and bezique and draughts and all manner of innocent pastimes; now we sit with ugly discs over our ears, looking like prehistoric monsters, for hours at a stretch; long strings fasten us to a switch-board, or whatever it is called; coils of wire complicate the carpet; conversation is at an end; silence reigns supreme; nobody hears the door-bell when it rings, and folk are kept standing on the step in the cold, thinking unutterable things. Our faces wear a strained expression and a far-away look comes into our eyes; we are all listening to a talk on beetles or to a strident soprano or to the twangy tintinnabulations of the Savoy Orpheans. I wish to make a remark; I make it; nobody hears it. I repeat the observation a little louder; somebody says "What?" in an impatient tone. I repeat my remark a third time; somebody removes one 'phone from his or her ear, catches what I say indistinctly, makes a random reply, shuts up the ear again, and relapses into unconsciousness. It reminds me of Miss Betsy Trotwood with the cotton-wool in her ears; little Mr. Chilli offers a faint attempt at conversation; Miss Trotwood pulls a wad out of her

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ear, says "What?" very loudly, receives the effort with a snort, and corks herself at one blow.

Sometimes there is an attempt at talk with the 'phones on. The effect is indescribable. I am, perhaps, reading the evening paper and am 'phoneless for a while—my ears get hot and tickly and out of shape with the beastly things—and I am suddenly startled by a bellow from Percy, who wishes to know whether I have heard the latest score by the M.C.C. in Australia. Percy seems to think I am deaf. His voice is tremendous at any time, but when he addresses me with the 'phones on his ears I nearly leap from my chair. Everybody who talks with 'phones on talks like that. Even Scheherazade, whose voice at other times is to me like the music of the spheres, volunteers piercing information, as if I were a mile off instead of the other side of the hearth-rug; Priscilla is apparently under the impression that I am a very old man, and speaks to me as though I were waving an ear-trumpet; while Felix assumes a high note as if he were calling for help. Conversation is a failure.

Wireless is really a weird business. It seems to be endowed with magical properties and to be able to change a naturally lively family into stone. Sometimes, however, it transforms them into apparent imbeciles. Any stranger suddenly entering the room would certainly think so. It all depends on what is transpiring a hundred miles or so away. Suppose it is a symphony from 2 LO that is coming

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through. The stranger enters, finds us all in our chairs in characteristic attitude—Scheherazade with her legs crossed and dangling a loose slipper from the end of one foot in that distracting way of hers; Priscilla with her legs folded up under her in some mysterious fashion on the sofa; Felix with his hands clasped in his lap, gazing into futurity with an immovable countenance; Percy lying on the small of his back with his legs thrust straight out before him, lest he should spoil the crease in his trousers or make them baggy at the knees; myself with my chin in my waistcoat and knees spread wide apart, and a hand upon each, an attitude abhorred of Scheherazade, who describes it as vulgar. Thus the stranger finds us, in a room as silent as the grave. Now the symphony is on, and emotion begins to find expression in each of the listeners. Scheherazade closes her eyes with a seraphic expression, and her loose slipper hangs so perilously loose that I am almost impelled to scream as I watch it oscillating on one toe, fascinated; Priscilla cuddles her legs under her more comfortably, and wears a wistful look in her eyes; Felix, whose emotions are seldom stirred, still wears a mask of immobility; Percy, who likes music, but hardly knows one tune from another, peruses his book steadily; I, seized with facetiousness, try to imagine myself conducting the symphony, and beat time with the poker. Or suppose it is "John 'Enry calling," and his altercations with "Blossom" are coming through in that delicious and

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inimitable drawl of his. Then the startled stranger will behold us nodding amiably at one another, our faces wreathed in fatuous smiles. He will hear a long-drawn wail from Scheherazade, suggestive of pain, but is really laughter making her sore about the sides, and he will see her wiping her eyes; he will hear hoarse guffaws issuing from the depths of Percy; he will hear a succession of giggles coming from Priscilla, and explosive gurgles from Felix; and he will see me beaming and grinning and slapping my knee apparently at nothing. What must he think, but that we have all taken leave of our senses? Yes, I think that wireless must be pronounced a mixed blessing.

Still, on the whole, it is a blessing. Invalids must find it so, and lonely persons, and folk who live in country places where there is but "Lenten entertainment." I like to hear the news bulletin. It gives me a real thrill every night to hear the solemn tones of Big Ben booming out the hour of seven, and to hear a pleasant voice from London pronouncing the mystic formula, "Copyright by Reuter, the Press Association, Exchange Telegraph, and Central News." At that moment I feel as if I were at the hub of the universe, and in touch with the many-coloured drama of the world. I could dispense with the weather forecast; it is too full of depressions from Iceland, and ridges of low pressure lying out in the Atlantic. Still, it does give some impression of the activities of the elements. I like to hear all

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about the world of sport, and when any cricket intelligence is announced I have visions of the green turf of the Oval and Lord's, and dream of my school-days when I captained the First Eleven and took wickets with insidious slows. I don't like the Foreign Exchange Market; the 'phones always come off then, and I burst once more into the immediate life around me. I have no interest whatever in "Sterling on New York," whatever that may mean, or in Italian lira, or Spanish pesetas (which generally sounds like Spanish potatoes), or in all the rates of South American States. I suppose it interests folk with money in their pockets, but as I never have any in mine, my emotions are at zero.

As for broadcasting—I mean the actual process of doing it in the studio—I never had a more dismal experience. Your voice sounds perfectly dead; you are unutterably lonely; you talk to an apparatus which has no inspiring properties about it; your audience is invisible; you don't know whether you are being transmitted clearly, or whether you are being mixed up with telephone calls and "atmospherics"; you are vaguely aware of a small window at your back through which engineering satellites may be seen (if you are misguided enough to look round); you have no encouragement, no response, no intimacy of touch; you might be the only human being in the world. And there you stand, talking your manuscript to nobody (apparently) until you are almost terrified at the sound of your

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own voice. It's no' canny! Oh for but one friendly eye! But no; you finish your solitary task, and are then conducted by an indifferent and nonchalant "Uncle" to the retiring room, where you put on your coat and go forth into the night, feeling as if you had committed some secret misdemeanour, and thankful for the gleam of the friendly stars.

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